WHAT IF CHARLES V HAD WAGED WAR ON HENRY VIII?

HELLISH NELL: BRITAIN'S LAST WITCH

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WELCOME CHRISTMAS 2023

Colourised photographs of Charles Dickens on display in London, 2020. The Victorian author's life and legacy is the focus of this issue's Essential Guide, which begins on page 23

The life of Charles Dickens is a rags-to-riches story worthy of one of his own novels. Born in 1812, the future author was forced into work at the age of 12 after his father was imprisoned for unpaid debts, but the harsh experience would later provide inspiration for his novels, many of which deal with the daily grind of the Victorian poor. For this month's Essential Guide, **we've enlisted Dickens expert Dr Lee Jackson to help us explore the life of the 19th-century writer** – from his personal struggles, to the various people and places that shaped him. Turn to page 23 to get started.

Elsewhere, we take a look at **the remarkable story of Spiritualist medium Helen Duncan**, who, in 1944, found herself in the dock at the Old Bailey, charged with contravening the Witchcraft Act of 1735 (*page 45*), and share **seven fascinating facts about the White House**, home to US presidents since 1800 – from the pets who have resided there, to the tough job of maintaining its pristine exterior (*page 20*).

Plus, with Christmas just around the corner, we reveal some incredible images of **festive celebrations across the ages** (*page 53*), and consider what might have happened had Catherine of Aragon's nephew, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, **gone to war with Henry VIII** (*page 16*). We'll also be answering a selection of historical conundrums, including **how long have camels been in Australia?** (*page 59*).

See you next month!

Charlotte Hodgman
Editor

Charlotte

THIS MONTH'S BIG NUMBERS

1
The number of snakes that have lived at the White House in Washington DC (to date)

12
The age at which a young Charles Dickens was sent to work in a London blacking factory

6
The length of time, in months, that Spiritualist medium Helen Duncan served in Holloway Prison

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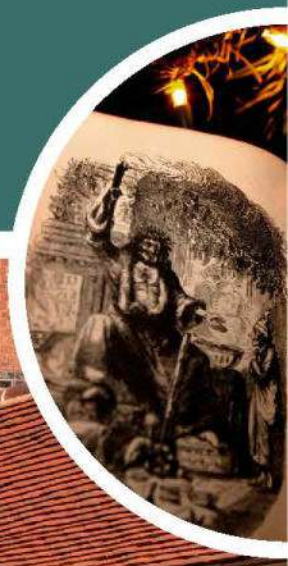
CONTENTS CHRISTMAS 2023



YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

CHARLES DICKENS

24 The life and times of Charles Dickens
Discover the milestones in the author's career and find out how they coincided with major world events

26 Exceeding expectations
Dr Lee Jackson follows Dickens's path from down-at-luck teenager to titan of Victorian literature

30 A journey through Dickens's London
Join Dr Lee Jackson on a tour of Dickensian London and learn how the city inspired the author's works

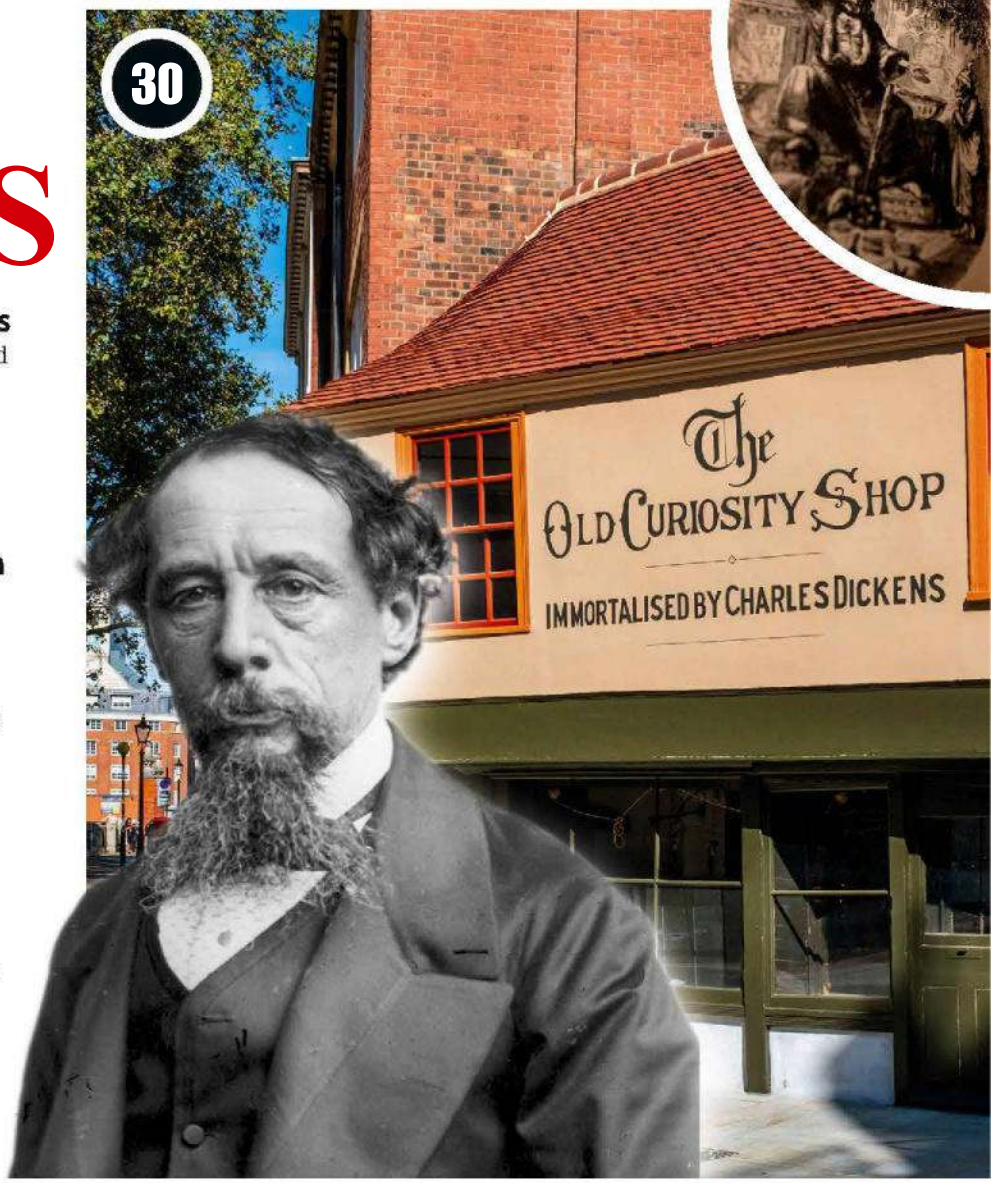
36 Giving the poor a voice
Find out how Dickens used his stories to highlight the plight of society's most vulnerable people

38 Reviving the festive spirit
Why the success of *A Christmas Carol* transformed the way that Britons chose to celebrate Yuletide

40 The author goes abroad
From Italy to the US, discover how Dickens's overseas travels shaped his writing – and his attitude to fame

42 Opinion
Dr Lee Jackson tells us why he believes the author's remarkable stories still endure today

43 Get hooked
Take your knowledge further with our pick of the best books, podcasts and TV programmes to explore next



▲ Explore the London locations linked to Dickens – and find out why not every tourist destination is what it claims to be

FEATURES

16 What if... Charles V had invaded England?
Dr Owen Emmerson considers how Henry VIII could have been deposed

20 7 things you (probably) didn't know about the White House
Dr Lindsay M Chervinsky reveals the secrets of the presidential mansion

45 Hellish Nell
Emeritus Professor Malcolm Gaskill tells the story of 'Britain's last witch'

50 Great Paintings: Venus, Mars and Cupid
How Rubens created his famous work

53 Gifts, trees and feasting
Photographs from Christmas past

▲ How many animals have lived at the White House? Seven surprising facts about the famous residence

GETTY IMAGES X8, ALAMY X6, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY X1

38

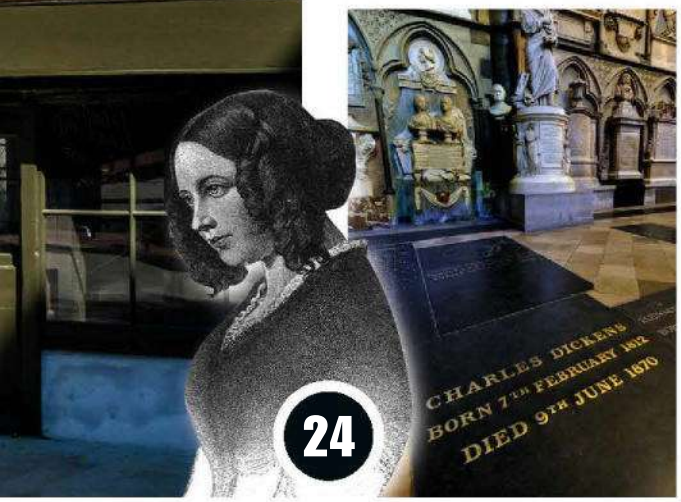
◀ Find out how Dickens's spooky Christmas masterpiece helped rekindle the Victorians' enthusiasm for the festive season

36

▲ Just how accurate is his portrayal of the poor?

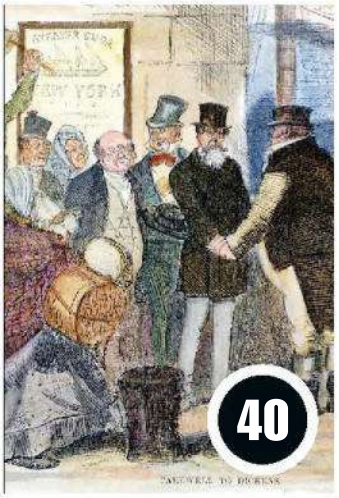
26

▲ Why Dickens's childhood wasn't the best of times



24

▲ Discover the key Dickens dates you need to know



40

▲ Learn how the author dealt with global fame

45

▲ Meet 'Hellish Nell' – the fraudulent medium who ended up behind bars

53

▲ Mistletoe and gas masks: a look at Christmas celebrations from yesteryear

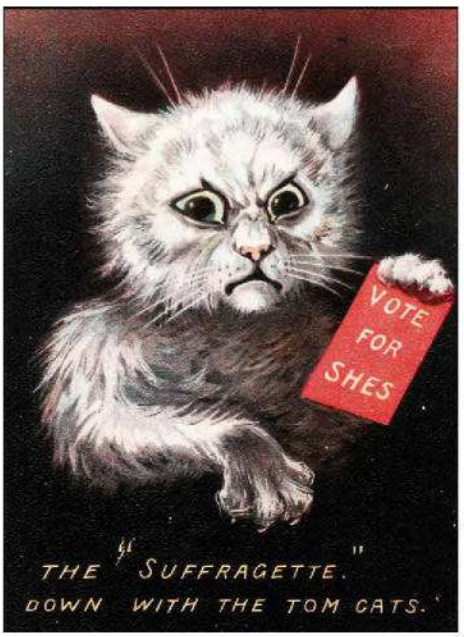
EVERY MONTH

6 Snapshots
French students rise up in protest, and more

12 This Month in History
December anniversaries, births and deaths

15 Life Hacks from History
Justin Pollard reveals how our forebears attempted to woo potential lovers

59 Miscellany
Did Napoleon blast the Sphinx's nose off? This, and other historical queries answered



▲ Discover what cats had to do with anti-suffragette propaganda

73 TV, Film & Radio
This month's history entertainment, including a new season of *The Crown*

76 Books & Podcasts
The latest historical reads and listens

78 On the HistoryExtra Podcast
Eight key episodes on the ancient Greeks

79 Prize Crossword

81 Next Issue

82 Photo Finish

SNAPSHOTS

1962 THE BIG CHILL

The winter of 1962–63 was one of the coldest on record in the UK. Dubbed the 'Big Freeze', it saw rivers, lakes and even coastal waters ice over. Following earlier significant snowfall, things got even worse when a blizzard hit on 29–30 December. The freezing temperatures ensured the snowpack remained in situ for months in some areas, and it would be 6 March before the country enjoyed a frost-free morning. Yet there was fun was to be had, as this man on skis in Earl's Court, London, proves. More than 60 years later, folk memories of the winter remain embedded in the national psyche.

GETTY IMAGES

SNAPSHOTS

1968 MAY DAYS

In May 1968, France was paralysed by fierce protests. Tensions had first begun to grow in 1967, when students at the Nanterre campus of the University of Paris rebelled against dormitory restrictions that prevented male and female students sleeping together. The unrest soon spread, and young people's frustrations with a tradition-bound society pushed them towards 'Third Worldism' – an anti-imperialist ideology that emphasised solidarity with the Global South and developing countries, reflected in the Maoist and Vietnamese iconography seen here. When workers downed tools in solidarity, President Charles de Gaulle left France in secret. After weeks of fighting, the unrest subsided – but de Gaulle's authority never recovered.

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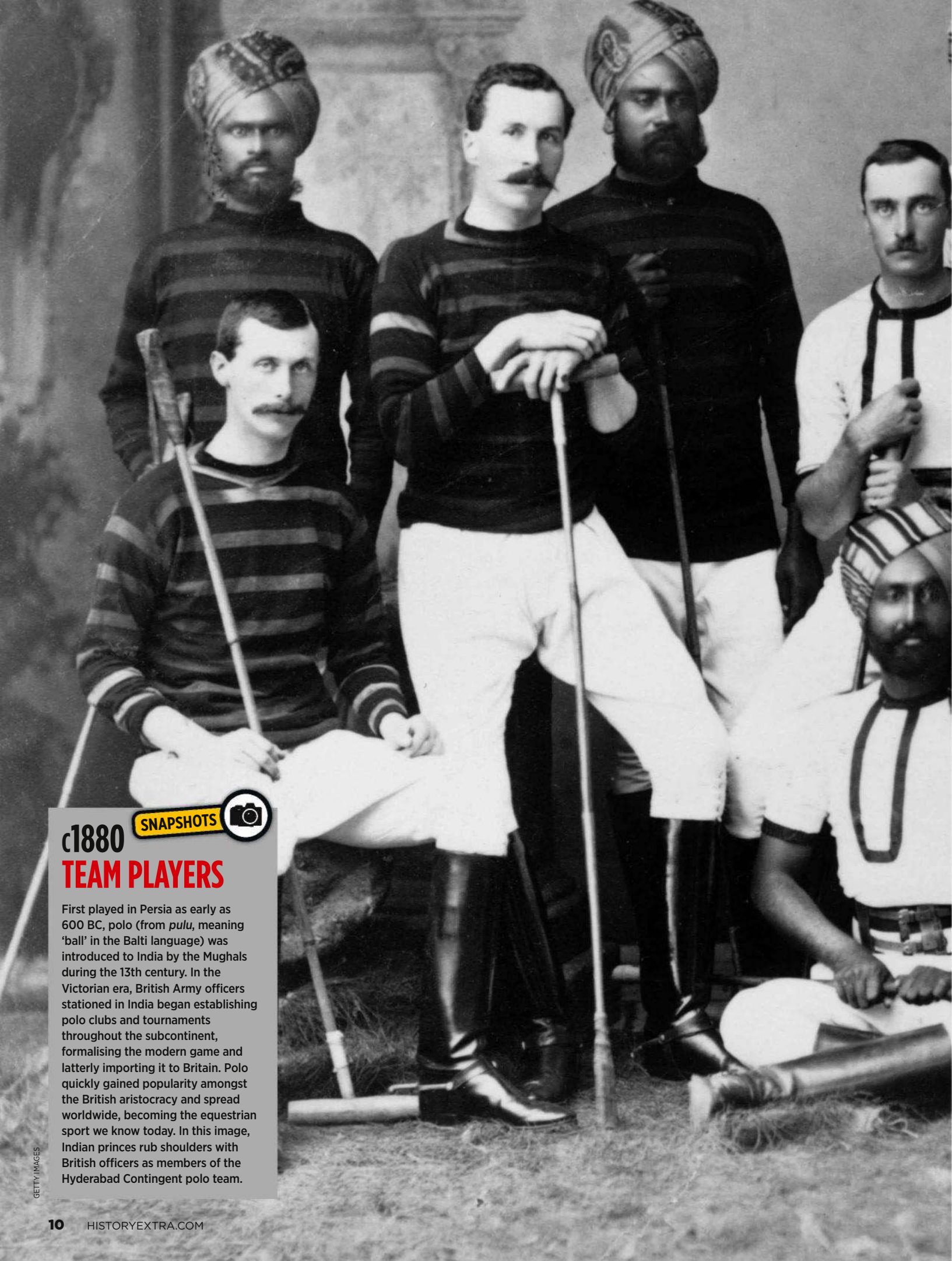

SNAPSHOTS

c1880
TEAM PLAYERS

First played in Persia as early as 600 BC, polo (from *pulu*, meaning 'ball' in the Balti language) was introduced to India by the Mughals during the 13th century. In the Victorian era, British Army officers stationed in India began establishing polo clubs and tournaments throughout the subcontinent, formalising the modern game and latterly importing it to Britain. Polo quickly gained popularity amongst the British aristocracy and spread worldwide, becoming the equestrian sport we know today. In this image, Indian princes rub shoulders with British officers as members of the Hyderabad Contingent polo team.

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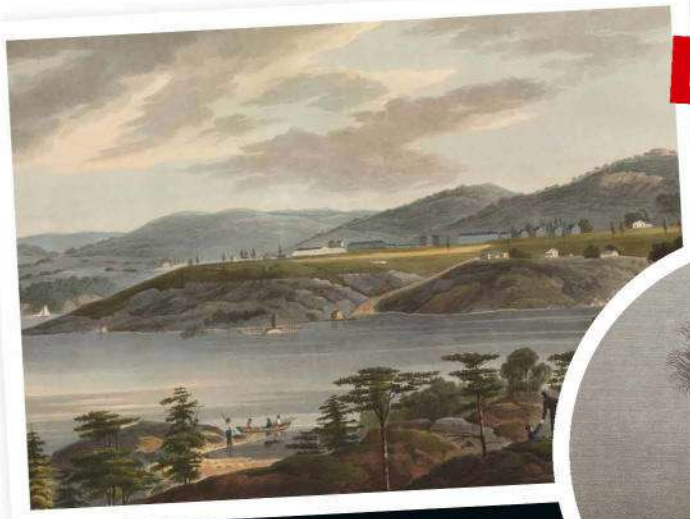
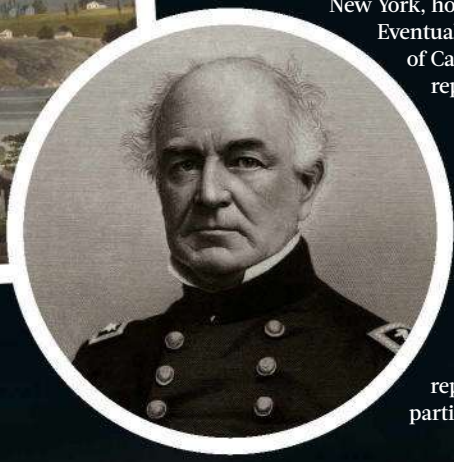
THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

WE LOOK BACK AT DECEMBER'S KEY ANNIVERSARIES





24–25 DECEMBER 1826
EGGNOG EXCESS FUELS RIOTS

Two days after smuggling whiskey onto the premises, a group of cadets at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, hold a late-night party on Christmas Eve 1826. Eventually, their boisterous singing attracts the ire of Captain Ethan Hitchcock, who attempts to reprimand them – to no avail.

During Christmas morning's roll call, many cadets, visibly inebriated, openly revolt. Hitchcock's attempts to read the riot act fail and he is besieged in his room, with one cadet even firing a pistol. Meanwhile, rumours of reinforcements provoke more cadets to take up arms. By breakfast, their sober peers succeed in calming the rabble and order is restored.

The Eggnog Riot tarnishes West Point's reputation, and 19 of the 70 cadets known to have participated are ultimately expelled.

ABOVE: **West Point viewed from across the Hudson River**

RIGHT: **Captain Ethan Hitchcock took refuge during the cadets' bawdy Yuletide antics**

MAIN: **Eggnog – the boozy festive tipple that plunged the United States' prestigious military academy into chaos**

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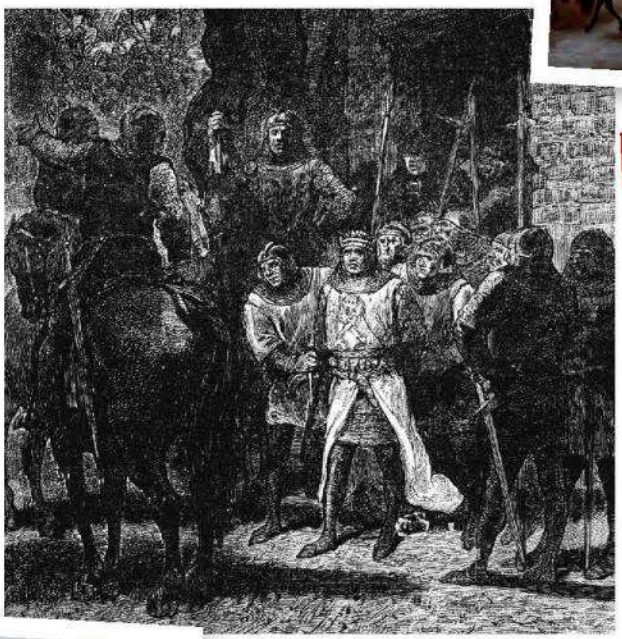
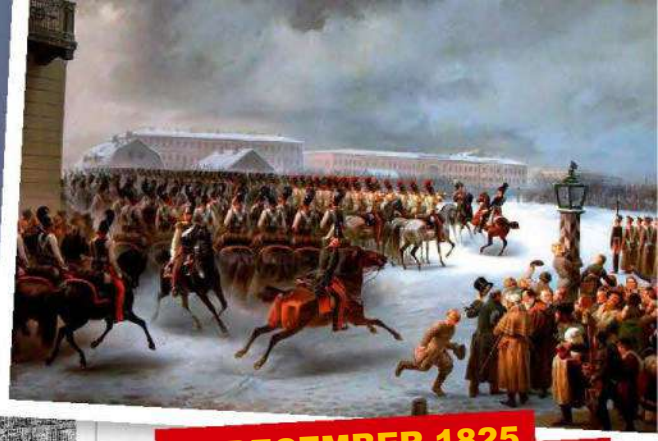
20 DECEMBER 1192
RICHARD THE LIONHEART IS CAPTURED



In October 1192, England's crusader king Richard I – perhaps better known as Richard the Lionheart – departs the Holy Land, intending to sail home. But the monarch's hopes of a smooth journey are thwarted when storms leave him stranded first in Corfu, and then somewhere near Venice.

Forced to cross territory controlled by his bitter rival, Leopold, Duke of Austria, a feverish Richard collapses near Vienna. Despite attempts at disguise, he is apprehended by Leopold's men on 20 December and imprisoned. Eventually, in February 1194, his countrymen end up paying a hefty ransom for his release.



26 DECEMBER 1825
REBEL TROOPS ARE KILLED IN ST PETERSBURG

On 1 December 1825, Russia's Alexander I dies of illness, paving the way for his brother and designated heir, Constantine, to take the imperial crown. But any hopes of a peaceful succession fade when Constantine insists that the siblings' reactionary younger brother, Nicholas, ascends the throne instead. Angry at the turn of events, 3,000 dissenting soldiers try to mount a coup in St Petersburg on 26 December, backed by civilian supporters. Perturbed, Nicholas orders loyalist troops to fire on the crowd, and a bloodbath ensues.

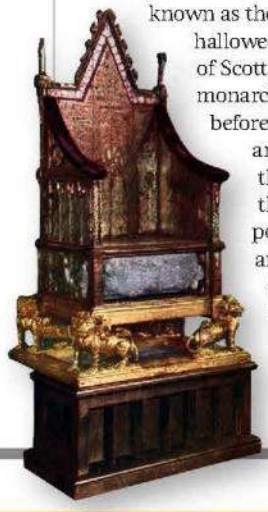
17 DECEMBER 1903
THE WRIGHT BROTHERS ACHIEVE POWERED FLIGHT

On 14 December 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright travel to a beach near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, to test out their latest invention. Constructed at a nearby camp, the brothers' 'airplane' which they have christened the *Flyer* stalls during take off and crashes.

But three days later, their fortunes improve. With the wind blowing at around 20mph, Orville takes the controls and the machine accelerates, briefly leaving the ground. On the day's fourth and final flight each flight longer than the one before Wilbur manages to keep the *Flyer* airborne for an impressive 59 seconds, covering a distance of 260 metres.

25 DECEMBER 1950
STUDENTS STEAL THE STONE OF SCONE

Creeping into Westminster Abbey via a building yard, a small group of University of Glasgow students proceed to St Edward's Chair. They retrieve the ancient sandstone block known as the Stone of Scone a hallowed relic used in the crowning of Scottish, and later British, monarchs from beneath the chair, before accidentally dropping it and cracking it in two. As they take the fragments to their getaway cars, a passing policeman stops for a chat and a cigarette, slowing their escape. Months later, the repaired stone is placed at Arbroath Abbey, site of the declaration of Scottish independence in 1320.



DIED: 29 DEC 1170
THOMAS BECKET

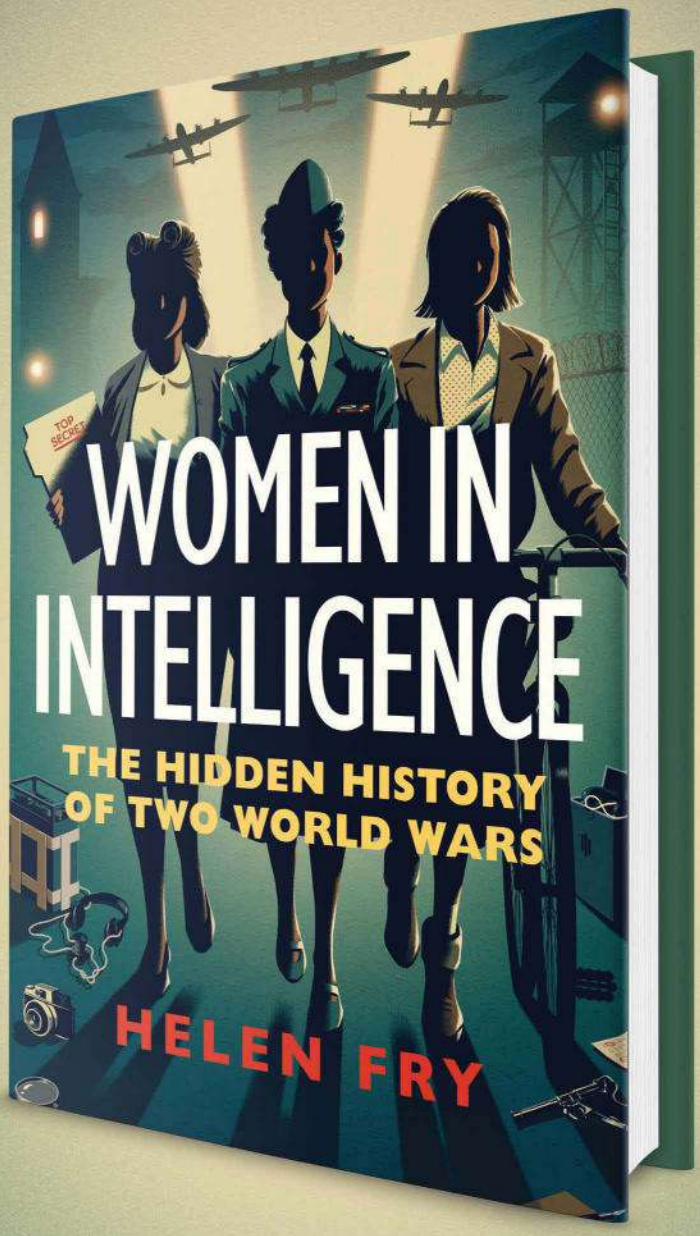
The Archbishop of Canterbury is murdered by supporters of Henry II in Canterbury Cathedral. Becket's dispute with Henry over the Church's independence – and his subsequent murder – make him a martyr, and he is canonised as a saint in 1173.

BORN: 23 DEC 1867
MADAM CJ WALKER

The first female self-made millionaire in America is born in Delta, Louisiana. Growing up in poverty, she creates a cosmetics and haircare empire tailored to black women. She also becomes famous for her philanthropy, political activism and patronage of the arts.

‘This account is long overdue’

Sir David Omand GCB, former Director of GCHQ



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LIFE HACK #09

How to fall in love

Struggling to find that special someone? **Justin Pollard** looks at the ways in which our ancestors tried to woo would-be lovers – and deal with the consequences when things didn't *quite* go to plan

Love is one of history's unintended consequences, taking generals away from battles, rulers away from governing and ordinary people away from their sanity (and trousers). But what can history teach us about falling in love?

Firstly, you've got to meet 'the one'. Indeed, 'one' is usually the preferred number, unless you're reading the 1631 'Wicked' Bible, which contains a handy misprint for would-be fornicators: "Thou Shalt Commit Adultery". This was very much on the physicist Erwin Schrödinger's mind when he first arrived at the University of Oxford in the 1930s and attempted to set up a ménage à trois, much to the disgust of his hosts. Feeling unwelcome, he eventually returned to his native Austria.

DRUNK IN LOVE

Having found 'the one', we must make a good impression. This is where the US millionaire James Gordon Bennett Jr went wrong. Turning up drunk to a New Year's Day party at his fiancée's house in 1877, he took a wrong turn and proceeded to urinate into a fireplace in front of all the guests. His subsequent horsewhipping at the hands of his prospective brother-in-law put him off marriage for another 37 years.

Having won your lover's heart, it's time to show that you care with a gift. Prince Grigory Orlov, a former favourite of Catherine the Great, purchased the last-known part of the 787-carat Great Moghul diamond and gave it to the empress in a bid to rekindle her dwindling affections. It didn't work and Orlov died insane, obsessed with money, and still out of favour.

The statuettes on the bonnets of Rolls-Royce cars are modelled on Eleanor Thornton – lover of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu

But perhaps best of all is the secret token – that little act or gift never spoken of but which you know. Eleanor Thornton was the secretary and lover of the motoring pioneer Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. When Messrs Rolls and Royce asked him to come up with a bonnet ornament for their cars, he had a statuette of his lover commissioned – the 'Spirit of Ecstasy', known in the Montagu family as "Miss Thornton in her Nightie".

But the course of true love never runs smooth, and there will be pitfalls. In 1765, during the reign of Qing dynasty emperor Hongli, the Step Empress Nara cut her hair. Not a problem you might think, but no one seems to have told her that the haircut was a sign of mourning in the Manchurian tradition, and was taken as a direct curse on the emperor. Nara was promptly dismissed.

Just under a century later, in the 1840s, the Irish dancer Lola Montez managed to upset an entire nation thanks to her affair with Ludwig I of Bavaria. When she demanded to be made a countess, the whole Bavarian cabinet resigned and Ludwig was forced to abdicate. Lola even had to form a militia of besotted students to help her escape to Switzerland.

A STORMY RELATIONSHIP

And that brings us to our last piece of advice – get over it! Either get married, run away together, or simply move on.

But what if there's a legal impediment to your marriage? Never mind: someone like Alexander Keith might be able help. In the mid-18th century, Keith operated out of prison as a rogue vicar, marrying couples who needed parental consent but didn't have it. As he was already in prison, the state couldn't arrest him, forcing them to pass the 1753 Marriage Act. On the day before the act came into force, Keith married 61 couples.

For some, true love can be bittersweet. In 1718, a newly engaged couple named Sarah Drew and John Hewit of Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire, sought shelter from a storm by hiding under heaps of barley. At that the moment, they were struck by lightning and killed – a story that so moved the poet Alexander Pope that he immortalised the lovers in a famous epitaph. So much for a happy ending.

JUSTIN POLLARD is an acclaimed historian and writer. As a historical consultant he has worked on more than 50 film and TV projects, from *Elizabeth* and *Mulan* to the BBC quiz show *QI*

GETTY IMAGES X3

WHAT IF... CHARLES V HAD INVADED ENGLAND?

Nige Tassell asks **Dr Owen Emmerson** about the possible chain of events had Henry VIII been deposed by the Holy Roman Emperor

When, in 1533, Henry VIII defied Pope Clement VII and married Anne Boleyn, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, was apoplectic. Frustrated at Clement's impotence in the face of Henry's insubordination, Charles sought papal assurances concerning the English king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Charles V's aunt. Clement threatened excommunication, which Henry ignored, thereby setting in motion the English Reformation. If the pope was toothless, a full-scale invasion of England by Charles wouldn't be.

"There were undoubtedly great fears at Henry's court that such an invasion was possible," says Dr Owen Emmerson, author of a number of books on Tudor history, including, with Kate McCaffrey and Alison Palmer, *Catherine and Anne: Queens, Rivals, Mothers*. "Henry's new minister Thomas Cromwell knew well that riots in support of Catherine would have been warmly met by faithful English Catholics. He was also acutely aware that letters encouraging an invasion of England were being sent by Charles's ambassador, Eustace Chapuys. His dispatches reveal a court terrified at the potential of Charles's invasion. According to Chapuys, the mere hint of an impending attack would have 'the king and court taking flight like a frightened flock of birds'."

Fortunately for Henry, the Holy Roman Emperor was already heavily engaged elsewhere. "Charles's ongoing commitment to war with France and the Ottoman empire took precedence. His propensity to wage war was a costly one, exhausting his revenues. The Ottoman expansion into Europe was a persistent threat and Charles fought continually with Suleiman the Magnificent, so opening yet another front would have contained unnecessary risks for him."

Despite Chapuys's apparent observations about the fear within Henry's court, Dr Emmerson has no doubt that the king wouldn't have shirked the fight had an invasion materialised. Whether he would have been victorious is another thing altogether. If he had, what is certain is that "his profile at home and abroad would have been substantially bolstered. Those in support of the Boleyn marriage may have moved harsher still against Catherine and Mary. Henry would have surely felt reassured that his radical course was correct and moved more quickly and more firmly with the dissolution of the monastic houses.

"Charles's defeat might have sent the same ripples through the Catholic strongholds across Europe as the defeat of Hungary by the Ottomans at the battle of Mohács in 1526. Charles could not afford such a defeat in England and risk igniting another beacon of reformist-leaning light in Europe."

SENT TO THE TOWER

However, Henry's defeat at Charles's hands would have altered the course of English history. Dr Emmerson believes that, unless he was killed in battle like Richard III, Henry would have been incarcerated in the Tower of London. "It is debatable whether Charles would have ordered the death of an anointed monarch, and even less sure that Catherine would have sanctioned the execution of the husband she so loved. However, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that, once incarcerated, Henry may have experienced a convenient 'accident' in the Tower, as had Henry VI before him."

Dr Emmerson believes that the pregnant Anne Boleyn would have also been held in the Tower, spared the gallows "pleading her belly". Her daughter Elizabeth would still have been born, but not become the icon of England she later did. Anne may well have been executed after the birth, a fate

IN CONTEXT

Henry VIII had married Catherine of Aragon in 1509, the queen giving birth to a daughter, Mary, seven years later. However, the marriage failed to produce a surviving son, which led the king – who had already embarked on a relationship with Catherine's maid of honour, Anne Boleyn – to seek an annulment. When Pope Clement VII refused to grant the request and Henry responded by renouncing papal authority, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (who just so happened to be Catherine's nephew) was incensed. An invasion of England could well have been launched, an event which, if successful in removing Henry, would have altered the course of the nation's history.

Catherine of Aragon pleaded with Henry VIII not to go ahead with his plans for divorce – but he was obsessed with Anne Boleyn and his desire for a male heir

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ABOVE: **An image from the 1530s depicts Henry VIII trampling on Pope Clement VII, whose authority he vehemently rejected**

TOP LEFT: **Charles V, shown here c1532, could have invaded England and placed the young Princess Mary on the throne**

also likely to have been meted out on the rest of her family, who were, he says, "despised for supplanting Catherine".

A YOUNGER QUEEN

With Henry deposed, the Holy Roman Emperor's choice of his successor would have been an obvious one. "To avoid the expense and administration of subsuming England into his empire, Charles would likely have further upheld the validity of Henry's union with Catherine by proclaiming the teenage Princess Mary as queen. With the experienced hand of her mother acting again as regent, Charles would not have needed to install a puppet monarch. With a devout Roman Catholic on the English throne and secure familial ties, Charles's alliance with, and control over, England would have been certain."

Dr Emmerson notes that the strength of this alliance may have seen England join Charles's forces against Francis I of France, which would surely have avoided Mary's humiliating loss of Calais, England's last stronghold on mainland Europe, in 1558. And if Henry's removal had foreign policy implications, it would have undoubtedly reset England's religious outlook.

"The country's religious make-up would be radically different to how it is today. Coming to the throne 20 years earlier than she would otherwise have, Mary would have married younger and had more opportunities to secure her succession with an heir. She would not have endured the years of submission during her father's reformation and then during her brother Edward VI's far more radical reforms. The monasteries would have survived, and the chaotic succession crises that dogged the Tudor dynasty after Henry's death would have been averted."

A clear, undisputed line of succession may well have presented itself over the subsequent centuries, as Dr Emmerson concludes. "It is not inconceivable that the descendants of Henry VIII would be inhabiting the British throne today." ⊙

"UNLESS HE WAS KILLED IN BATTLE LIKE RICHARD III, HENRY WOULD HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED IN THE TOWER OF LONDON"

DID YOU KNOW?

HOW UNFLATTERING

Charles V and his Habsburg relatives were renowned for their protruding lower jaws – the result of years of inbreeding. According to an Italian diplomat, Charles had "a long, cadaverous face and a lopsided mouth (which drops open when he is not on his guard)..."

GET HOOKED

WATCH

Dr Owen Emmerson discusses Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn in a special video created to accompany our podcast series *Six Wives: Secrets of the Tudor Queens*. Watch in full at *historyextra.com/boleyn-video*

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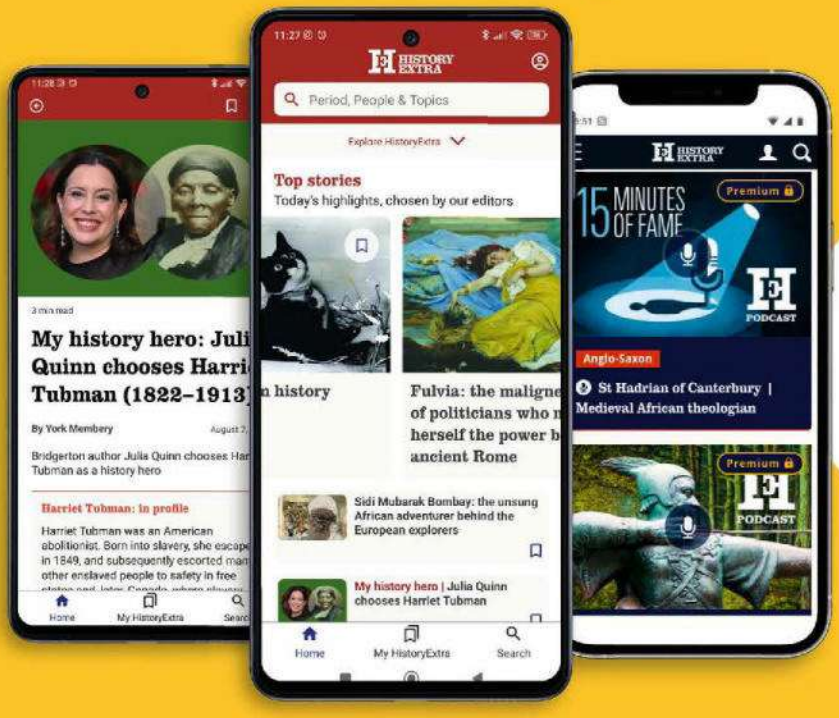

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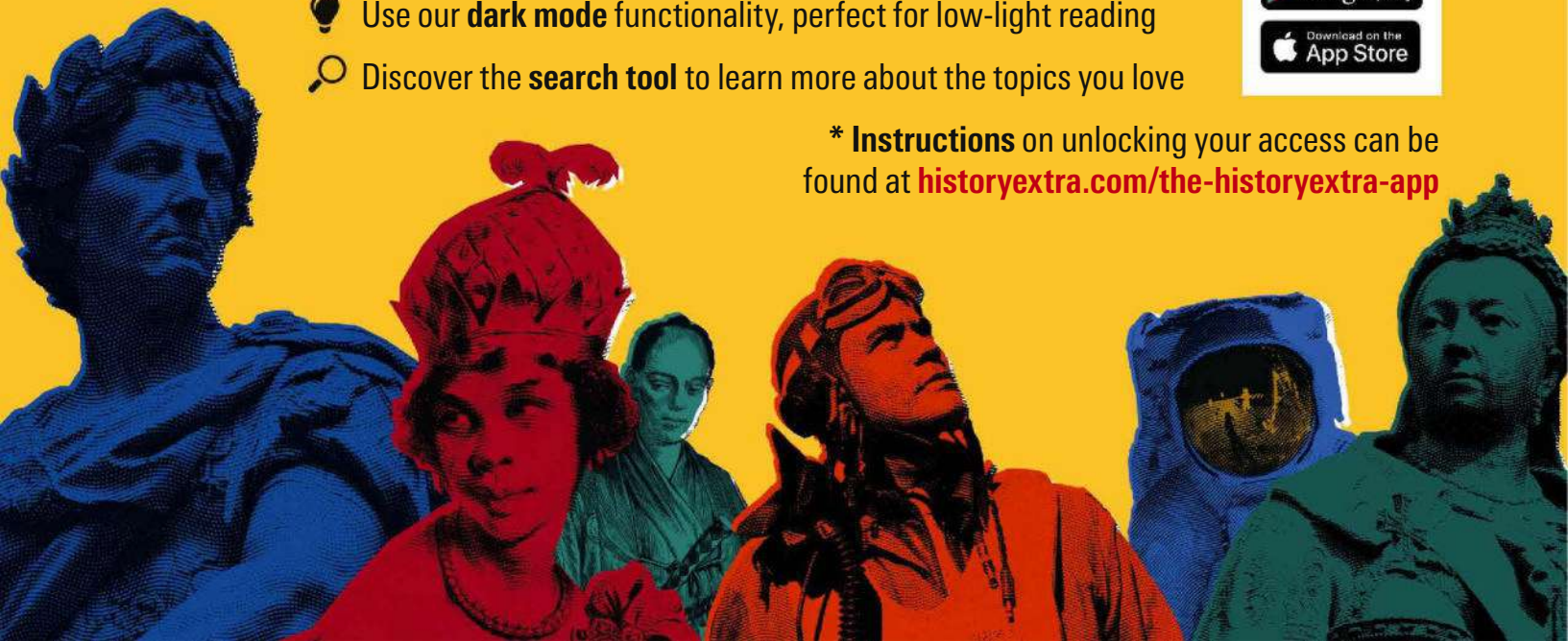


7 THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE WHITE HOUSE

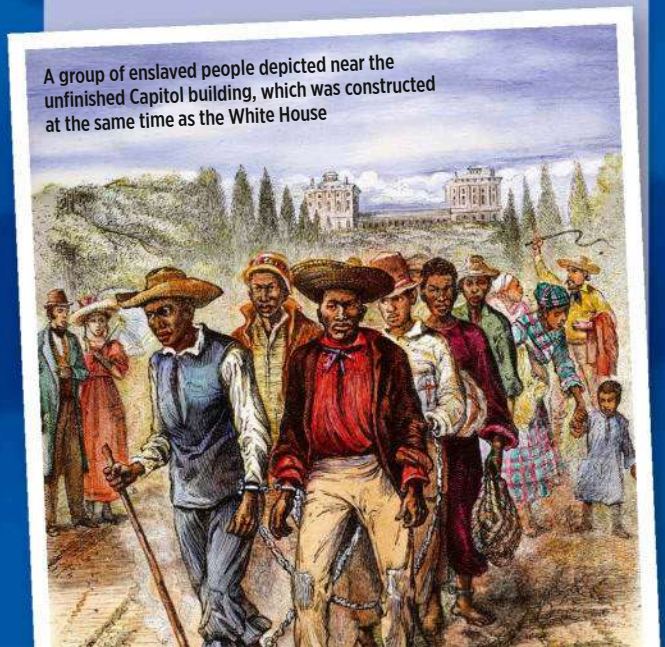
Presidential historian **Dr Lindsay M Chervinsky** reveals some of the most surprising facts about the world-famous US residence

1 THE WHITE HOUSE WAS PARTIALLY BUILT BY ENSLAVED WORKERS

Construction on the White House began in 1792 on a site in Washington DC selected by the first US president, George Washington. Over the next eight years, a mix of free African-American and white wage labourers, enslaved workers and skilled craftsmen toiled on the project, undertaking duties such as carpentry, stonemasonry and bricklaying.

Some of the enslaved workers were owned by the city commissioners charged with overseeing the project, as well as the building's architect, James Hoban. The vast majority, however, were hired from their owners in Washington DC, Virginia and Maryland, who then pocketed the enslaved people's wages.

Interestingly, many of the construction crews were shuttled back and forth between the White House and the nearby United States Capitol (built between 1793 and 1800), depending on which building site needed labour or had the most available materials at the time.



A group of enslaved people depicted near the unfinished Capitol building, which was constructed at the same time as the White House

Washington DC was set ablaze by British soldiers in August 1814

2 THE BUILDING WAS SET ON FIRE BY BRITISH FORCES

In August 1814, two years into the War of 1812, British forces marched into Washington DC and torched nearly all of the city's public buildings in retaliation for the damage that they had inflicted on York (now Toronto), Canada, the previous year.

Urban legend suggests that a rainstorm arrived and saved the White House from complete destruction. The truth, however, is that the rain actually made the damage worse. While the wet weather saved the surrounding buildings from catching fire, it nearly destroyed the walls of the White House altogether. The stone walls were incredibly hot from the fire and the cold rain caused them to shrink and crack.

Congress swiftly appointed a commission to inspect the damage, but the investigators found that almost everything inside had been destroyed, save for a few pots and pans in the basement kitchens. However, the resulting report concealed the true extent of the destruction in order to get the rebuilding process started immediately.

Some officials wanted to use the opportunity to move the capital to a more developed city – like Philadelphia, New York or Charleston – because lodging, food and entertainment options were still quite limited in DC. Furthermore, representatives from more distant states, like New Hampshire or Georgia, wanted to reduce the amount of time that they spent travelling.

However, eager to maintain a symbolic link with their predecessors, presidents James Madison and James Monroe rushed to rebuild the White House exactly as it appeared before. They even hired the same architect, James Hoban, to complete the renovation.

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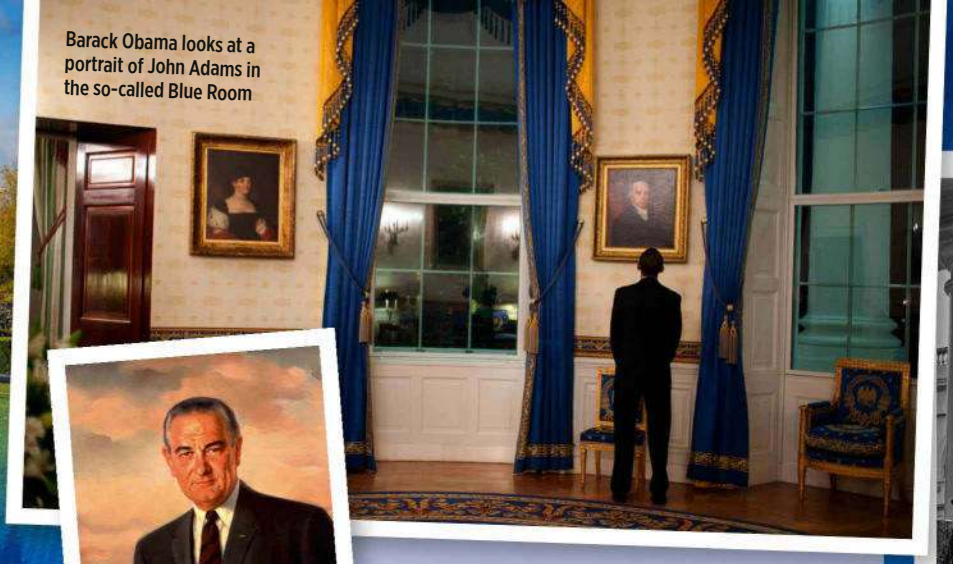
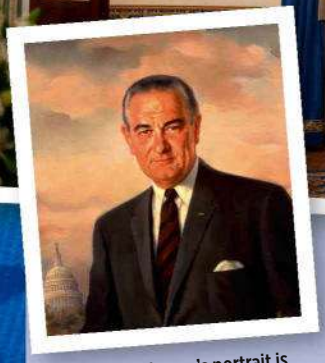


Barack Obama looks at a portrait of John Adams in the so-called Blue Room



Lyndon B Johnson's portrait is surprisingly modest, given his larger-than-life personality

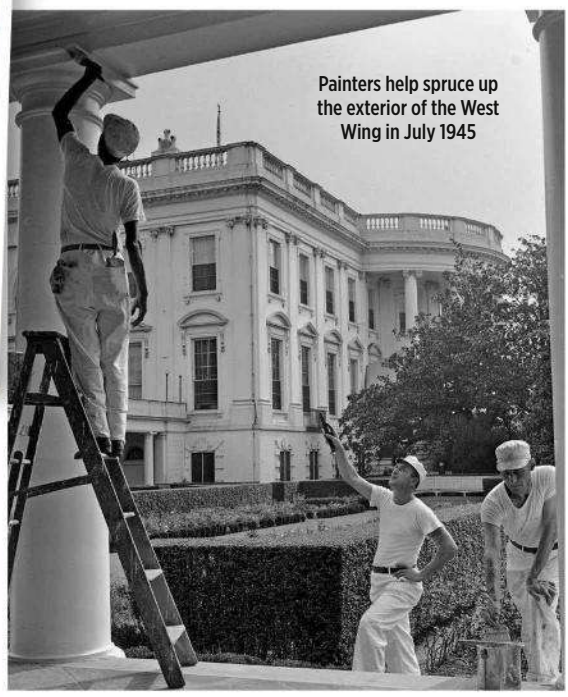
3 EACH PRESIDENT HAS A PORTRAIT HANGING IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Not only do all the former presidents have a portrait hanging in the White House, but the locations of the portraits follow a rough pattern. The portraits of the most recent presidents, for example, are situated in the entrance hall of the State Floor and extend chronologically up the stairway to the main residence.

Others are scattered about: George Washington and Theodore Roosevelt are in the East Room, Abraham Lincoln is in the State Dining Room, and William Howard Taft is in the Blue Room because that's where his portrait was painted. Meanwhile, Millard Fillmore and Chester A Arthur are hung in the East Wing simply because the paintings are too large to fit on any other wall. Most of the portraits in the Blue Room are of Virginia-born presidents, with the notable exception of Massachusetts-born John Adams, which I suspect would irk him.

But Lyndon B Johnson's portrait has the most interesting placement. Given that each president has a fair amount of influence over how their likeness is captured, one would expect Johnson's portrait to be equally grand. But instead, it's one of the smallest.

LBJ didn't explain why he requested such an artwork, but its location – hung in the corner of the Cross Hall, next to the doorway into the East Room – offers a clue. Few other portraits would fit in this space, so perhaps by selecting a diminutive portrait, Johnson was ensuring that he would always retain a place of prominence on the State Floor.



Painters help spruce up the exterior of the West Wing in July 1945

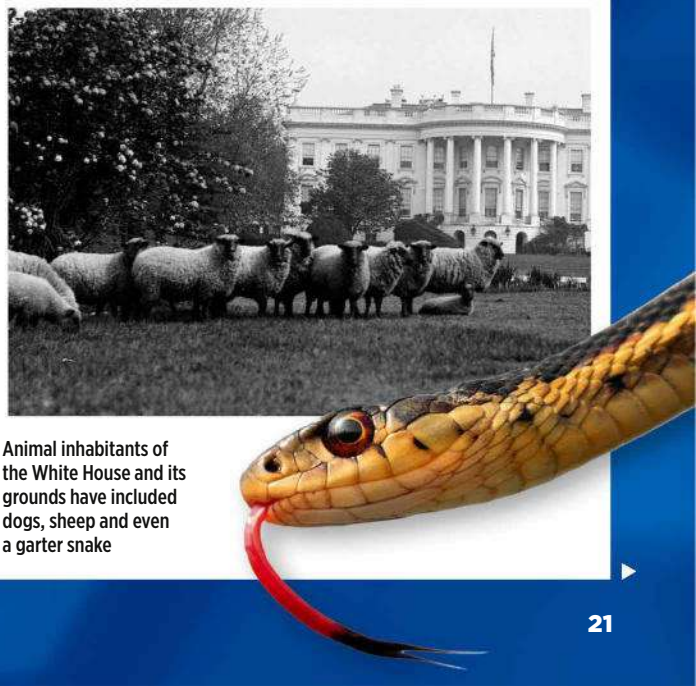
4 IT'S AN ONGOING BATTLE TO KEEP THE WHITE HOUSE WALLS WHITE

Keeping the White House white is no easy feat. Lime-based whitewash was originally applied to protect the porous sandstones, but by Jimmy Carter's administration (1977–81), the paint had become so thick that visitors couldn't see the carving details above the windows and doors, or any of the beautiful moulding. As a result, the White House underwent a significant external renovation to strip the many layers of paint, which wasn't completed until Bill Clinton's administration 20 years later. When finished, at least 45 coats of paint had been removed from the exterior walls.

5 DOZENS OF ANIMALS HAVE LIVED AT THE WHITE HOUSE

Most people are familiar with the dogs that have lived at the White House – such as Bo and Sunny Obama, or George W Bush's Scottish terriers, Barney and Miss Beazley. However, an entire menagerie of animals has previously called the building and its grounds home. Woodrow Wilson, for example, welcomed a herd of sheep to the South Lawn (*pictured right*), whose wool was then auctioned off to raise money for the Red Cross during World War I. In fact, one adventuresome ram named 'Hi' caused quite a bit of trouble when he repeatedly broke into the Oval Office.

And that's not all: John F Kennedy's daughter, Caroline, had a pet pony named Macaroni; First Lady Grace Coolidge had a raccoon named Rebecca; and William Howard Taft had a cow, Pauline Wayne, which roamed in front of the Old Executive Office Building. Perhaps best of all, Alice Roosevelt (Theodore Roosevelt's daughter) had a garter snake named Emily Spinach that she carried around in her purse and pulled out as a conversation piece at parties.



Animal inhabitants of the White House and its grounds have included dogs, sheep and even a garter snake

Ronald Reagan and his wife, Nancy, enjoy a quiet moment in the rooftop Solarium in 1981

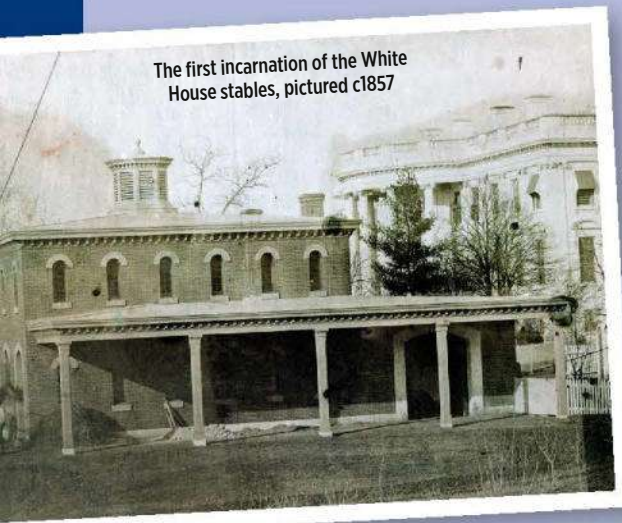
6 THE WHITE HOUSE COMPLEX IS DECEPTIVELY LARGE

While the White House appears to be two storeys tall from the street, there are actually six floors: four above ground and two below ground. While much of the State Floor and residence layout has remained the same since its construction, many other areas of the building have changed dramatically.

When you enter the White House today, for example, you would probably enter on the Ground Floor, or the first of the basement floors. But in 1901, the Ground Floor was primarily a work space. Instead of the China Room, the Vermeil Room, the Library and the Diplomatic Reception Room, there would have been a kitchen, laundry room, storage space for food and dishware, and sleeping spaces for the enslaved or free servants. The basement was notoriously damp and frequently infested with vermin and rodents.

There are other spaces that have been lost to history as well. Originally, the White House had a series of stables to house the president's horses, carriages, coachmen and grooms. However, this set-up ended when the final incarnation of the stables was converted into a garage in 1909.

The attic has also undergone many renovations. In its early years, it was used for storage, as a servants' sleeping quarters, and as a hiding place for the presidents' children. Later, in 1913, First Lady Ellen Wilson added guestrooms and a painting studio for her own use. But in the 1920s, engineers discovered problems with the roof structure, and the attic was subsequently remodelled to feature a sunroom (now the Solarium), as well as larger guest and service rooms, and a new steel and concrete roof.



The first incarnation of the White House stables, pictured c1857

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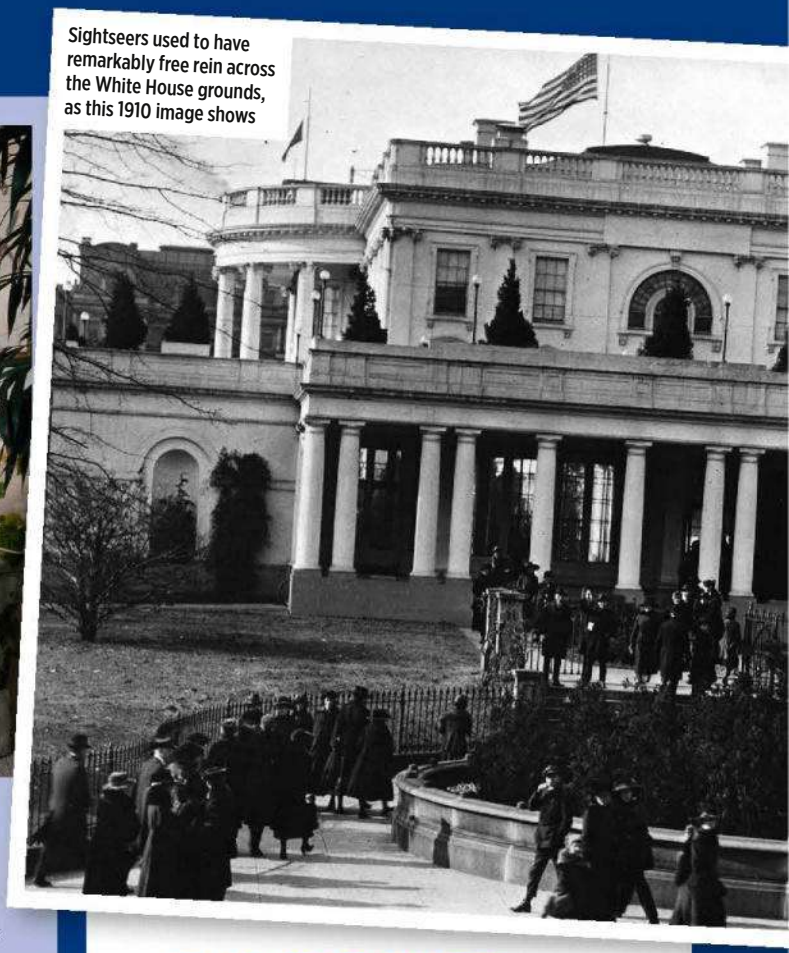

Sightseers used to have remarkably free rein across the White House grounds, as this 1910 image shows

7 THE GROUNDS USED TO BE OPEN TO EVERYONE

When John Adams moved into the White House on 1 November 1800, there was no fence or gate, and the grounds were open to pedestrians. Thomas Jefferson added a fence, later replaced by a stone wall, but he retained part of the grounds for common use. In 1873, Ulysses S Grant began closing the grounds at sunset for additional security, and in 1893, Grover Cleveland closed the South Grounds – typically the first family's garden – after strangers tried to take a picture of his young daughter, Esther. Eventually, the North and South Grounds were closed permanently in the 1920s at the recommendation of the Secret Service.

DR LINDSAY M CHERVINSKY is a senior fellow at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. Her books include the forthcoming *Making the Presidency: John Adams and the Precedents That Forged the Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2024)

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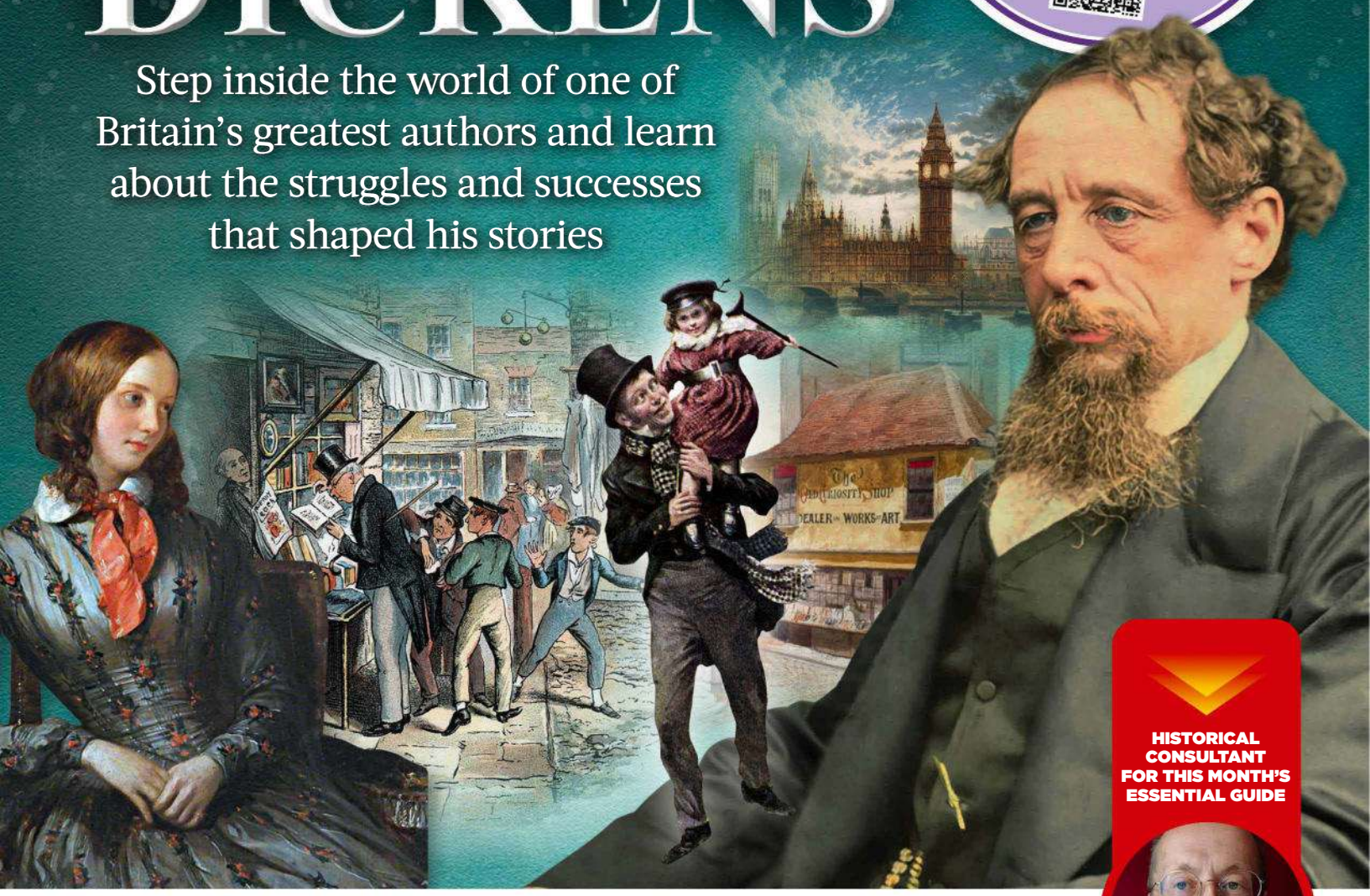
YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

CHARLES DICKENS

Step inside the world of one of Britain's greatest authors and learn about the struggles and successes that shaped his stories

PODCAST

Dr Lee Jackson discusses Dickensian London on a recent episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast. Listen at *historyextra.com/dickens-london-pod*



24 The life and times of Charles Dickens
Discover the milestones in the author's career and find out how they coincided with major world events

26 Exceeding expectations
Dr Lee Jackson follows Dickens's path from down-at-luck teenager to titan of Victorian literature

30 A journey through Dickens's London
Join Dr Lee Jackson on a tour of Dickensian London and learn how the city inspired the author's works

36 Giving the poor a voice
Find out how Dickens used his stories to highlight the plight of society's most vulnerable people

38 Reviving the festive spirit
Why the success of *A Christmas Carol* transformed the way that Britons chose to celebrate Yuletide

40 The author goes abroad
From Italy to the US, discover how Dickens's overseas travels shaped his writing – and his attitude to fame

42 Opinion
Dr Lee Jackson tells us why he believes the author's remarkable stories still endure today

43 Get hooked
Take your knowledge further with our pick of the best books, podcasts and TV programmes to explore next

HISTORICAL CONSULTANT FOR THIS MONTH'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE

DR LEE JACKSON
is a writer and historian with an interest in the social history and geography of Victorian London. His most recent book is *Dickensland: The Curious History of Dickens's London* (Yale, 2023).

GETTY IMAGES X5, ALAMY X2

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHARLES DICKENS

7 FEB 1812

▲ Charles Dickens is born in Portsmouth to John and Elizabeth Dickens.

18 JUN 1815

▼ An Anglo-Prussian victory at the battle of Waterloo (*depicted below*) brings the Napoleonic Wars to a close.

16 AUG 1819

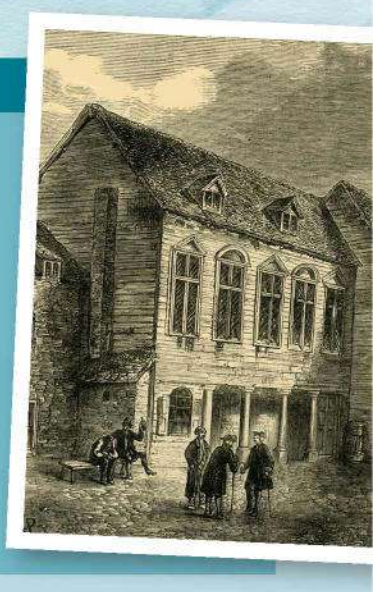
More than a dozen people are killed at a pro-democracy rally in Manchester. It will come to be known as the Peterloo Massacre.

1822

▲ The Dickens family moves to Camden Town, north London.

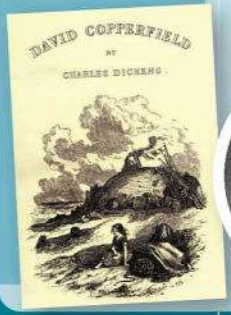
1824

▶ John Dickens is imprisoned for debt at Marshalsea Prison (*depicted right*). The young Charles is sent to work at Warren's Blacking Factory.



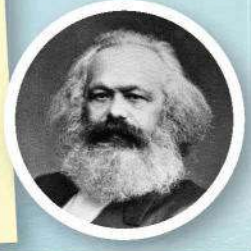
1849

▼ Serialisation of *David Copperfield* begins.



1848

▼ Revolutions sweep continental Europe. In London, Karl Marx publishes *The Communist Manifesto*.



1845

▲ A potato blight in Ireland leads to a devastating famine that will go on to claim around a million lives. Many more people end up emigrating overseas.

1844

Dickens and his family move to Italy for a year – an experience he will recount in *Pictures from Italy* (1846).

Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, is murdered in Carthage, Illinois.

1843

▶ Dickens begins writing *A Christmas Carol* in October, completing it six weeks later. It is published on 19 December, spawning a new festive literary genre.

1851

▼ The Great Exhibition opens at the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park.

1852

Serialisation of *Bleak House* begins.

A year after staging a coup d'état, President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte proclaims himself Emperor of the French.

16 OCT 1853

▲ The Ottoman empire declares war on the Russian empire, beginning the Crimean War.

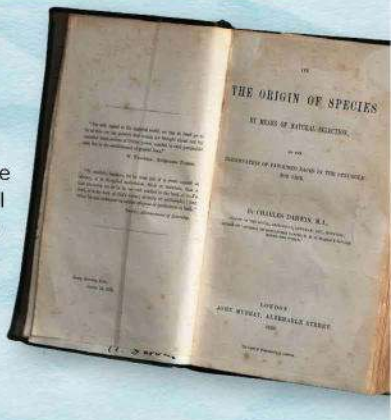
1857

▼ Dickens meets the teenage actress Ellen Ternan. The pair soon embark on an affair.

1859

A Tale of Two Cities is serialised.

▶ Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* is published, introducing the theory that all life on Earth evolved via natural selection.



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We chart the novelist's life and literary career against the backdrop of an era marked by war, revolution and significant social upheaval

WORDS: DANNY BIRD

1827–29

Dickens leaves school and gains employment as a clerk in a solicitor's office. He teaches himself shorthand and gains an insight into the legal profession, while also developing a flair for journalism as a freelance writer.

1830

▶ Dickens meets his first love, Maria Beadnell. Her parents don't approve, and the relationship fails to blossom.

◀ In France, the July Revolution topples the Bourbon monarchy. In Britain, William IV inherits the throne from his brother, George IV.

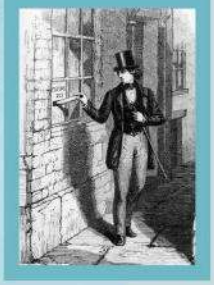
1833

Dickens's first published literary work, *A Dinner at Poplar Walk*, appears in a periodical called the *Monthly Magazine*.

The Factory Act outlaws the employment of children younger than nine in Britain.

1834

▼ Dickens becomes a reporter for *The Morning Chronicle*.



1836

▼ The author weds Catherine Hogarth (*below*), the daughter of a colleague. Serialisation of *The Pickwick Papers* begins.

1840

The Old Curiosity Shop begins serialisation.

▼ Queen Victoria marries her cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, at St James's Palace, London.

4 SEP 1839

▲ A diplomatic dispute between Britain and China over the latter's attempt to curtail the opium trade leads to the outbreak of the First Opium War.

1838

Serialisation of *Nicholas Nickleby* begins.

▼ *The People's Charter*, calling for electoral reform, is published by the Chartists.

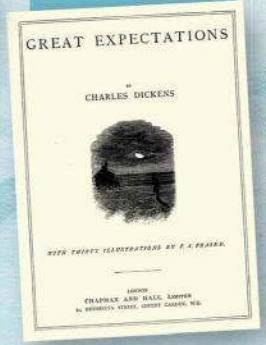
1837

▶ Charles, the first of Dickens's 10 children, is born. *Oliver Twist* begins serialisation in *Bentley's Miscellany*.

William IV dies on 20 June. His 18-year-old niece, Princess Victoria, takes the throne.

1860

▼ Serialisation of *Great Expectations* begins.

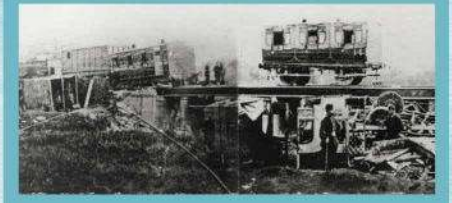


1861

▲ The American Civil War begins; Prince Albert dies.

1865

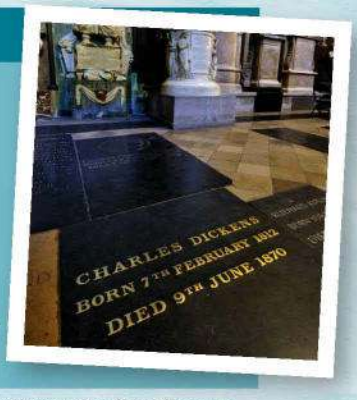
▼ Dickens survives a rail crash near the Kent town of Staplehurst.



The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution is ratified in December, formally abolishing slavery. The American Civil War effectively comes to an end.

9 JUN 1870

▶ Wracked by ailing health, Dickens dies at his home in Gads Hill, Kent. He is laid to rest within Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey.



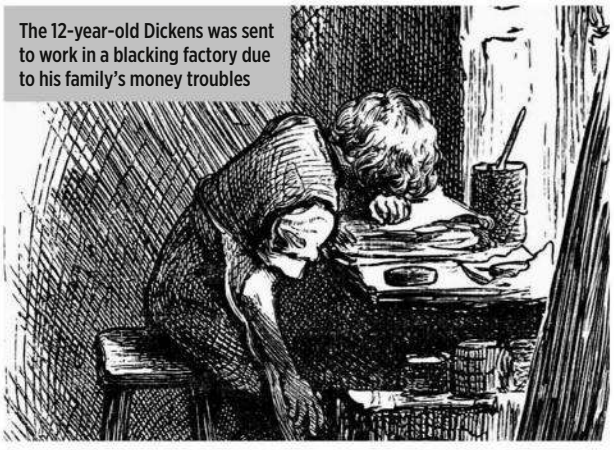
The Franco-Prussian War breaks out on 19 July, leading to the capture of Napoleon III at the battle of Sedan in September and the end of his empire.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

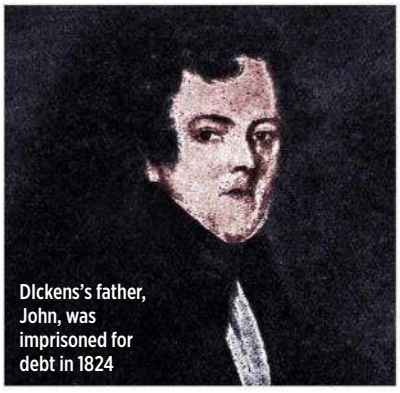
Dr Lee Jackson chronicles Charles Dickens's journey from down-at-luck teenager to titan of Victorian literature

Charles Dickens did not come from a privileged background, but nor were his parents without prospects. John Dickens (1785–1851), was the son of servants to the Crewe family – Cheshire gentry with a townhouse in Mayfair – whose patronage secured him a good position as a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. This was a notch up the social ladder and brought him into the circle of Elizabeth Barrow (1789–1863), whose father and brother were likewise civil servants. The couple married in London in 1809 at the church of St Mary-le-Strand and then returned to John's posting at Portsmouth. The following year, however, Elizabeth's father was discovered to have been systematically embezzling public funds and quietly fled the country. He pleaded that he had found himself incapable of supporting a large family. John Dickens, unfortunately, would prove equally bad with money.

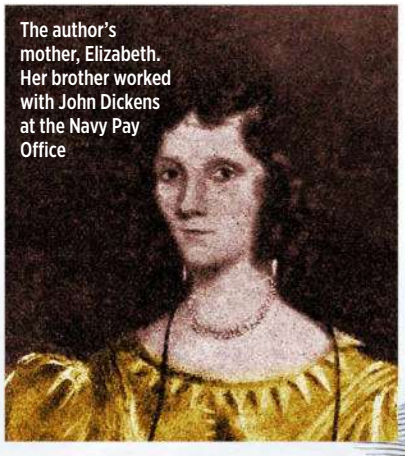
Elizabeth had her first child, Fanny, in 1810 and Charles was born on 7 February 1812 (six more children would follow over the course of 15 years). Charles's birthplace was a modest Georgian terrace in the suburb of Landport, a mile from the Portsmouth naval dockyard. The building, however, would only play a small part in the family's history and John Dickens was recalled to Somerset House in London in 1815. After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, he was then dispatched to Sheerness and Chatham in Kent, before returning to the capital in 1822. Charles would later write of his childhood years in Chatham that "all my early readings and early imaginations dated from this place" and would list some of those favourite stories in his autobiographical novel *David Copperfield* (1849), including the fantastical *Arabian Nights*. Kentish localities also loom large in his fiction, including in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), *Great Expectations* (1861) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). But, of course, the place that would truly light up his imagination was London – the city which he would later dub his "magic lantern".



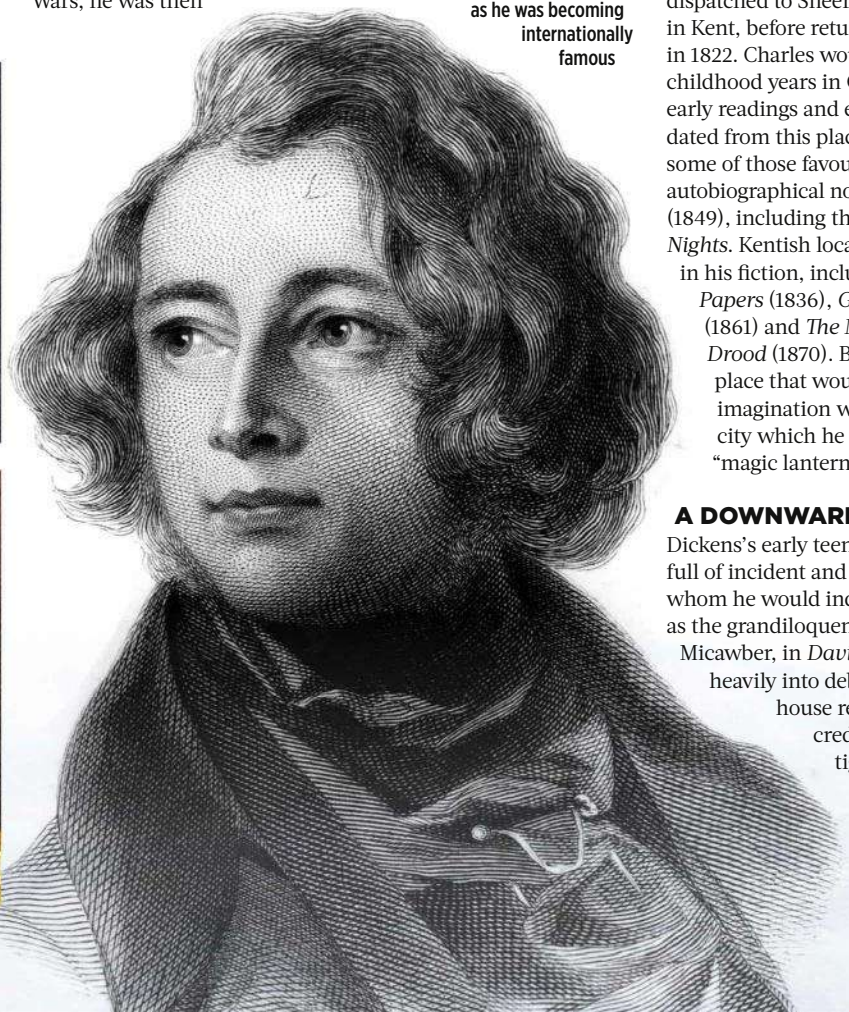
The 12-year-old Dickens was sent to work in a blacking factory due to his family's money troubles



Dickens's father, John, was imprisoned for debt in 1824



The author's mother, Elizabeth. Her brother worked with John Dickens at the Navy Pay Office



Dickens in 1839 – just as he was becoming internationally famous

A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Dickens's early teens in the capital were full of incident and upheaval. His father, whom he would indulgently caricature as the grandiloquent spendthrift, Wilkins Micawber, in *David Copperfield*, fell heavily into debt. The family moved house repeatedly, pursued by creditors. Money grew so tight that, at 12 years old, Charles was sent to work in a blacking factory, pasting labels on bottles

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of filthy polish – a source of shame and distress – hardly an occupation for anyone who had aspirations to middle-class respectability. He also could not help resenting the fact that Fanny, a talented pianist, had obtained a place at the recently founded Royal Academy of Music. Regardless, this miserable period would later be reworked into his fiction – the young David Copperfield endures a similar fate. Likewise, the plot of *Little Dorrit* (1855) draws upon his father's final indignity – imprisonment in the Marshalsea debtors' gaol. Fortunately, John Dickens obtained his freedom thanks to a well-timed inheritance. The family then rented yet another undistinguished house in Camden Town and Charles was sent to school – until the money ran out again, and he was found more suitable employment, as a lawyer's clerk.

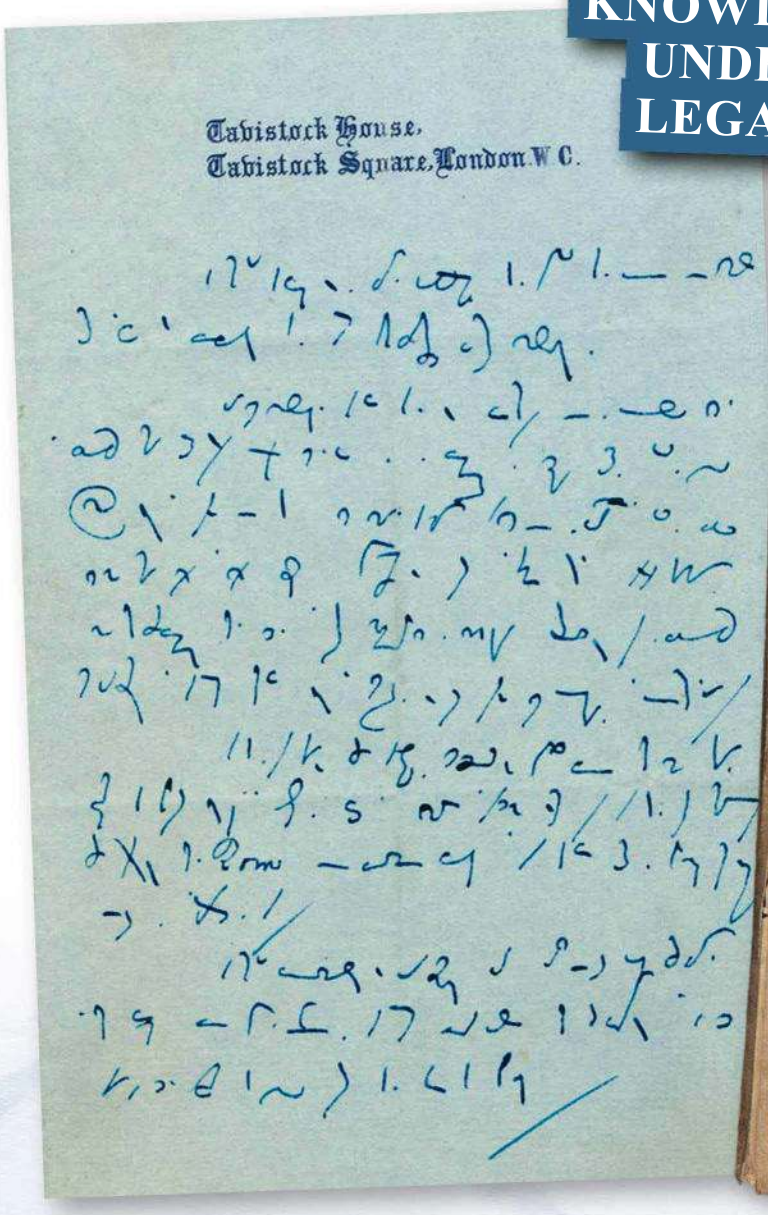
Dickens, by now aged 15, gained an intimate knowledge of the underbelly of legal London. He would utilise it to great effect in *Bleak House* (1852), the story of a long-running lawsuit that financially and morally bankrupts almost everyone involved. Ultimately, however, he decided to pursue a career in journalism, teaching himself a complex system of shorthand to become a parliamentary reporter for London newspapers. In the early 1830s, he also began to write sketches and stories, often rather comical in tone, under the pen-name 'Boz', collected and published together as *Sketches by Boz* (1836). This brought him some critical acclaim and the book's success ▶

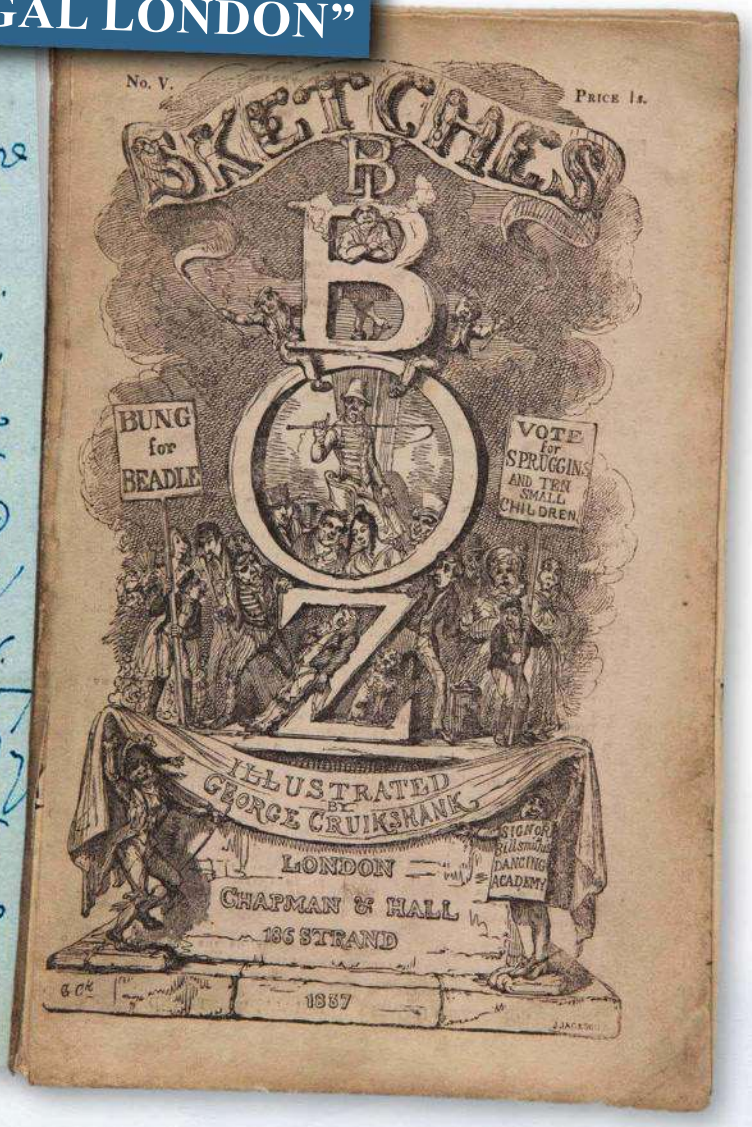
RIGHT: **Dickens's sister, Fanny, earned a place at the Royal Academy of Music – a stark contrast to the position that Dickens, toiling in a blacking factory, found himself in**

BELOW LEFT: **The author taught himself a complex system of shorthand during his time as a journalist**

BELOW RIGHT: **A book containing Dickens's early writings, *Sketches by Boz* (1836), earned critical acclaim**

"DICKENS, NOW AGED 15, GAINED AN INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNDERBELLY OF LEGAL LONDON"





The drawing room of 48 Doughty Street, Bloomsbury, where the author moved with his family in 1837. Today, it is open to the public as the Charles Dickens Museum

"HE WORKED AT A FRENETIC PACE, AND WAS CONSTANTLY SEARCHING FOR THE BEST DEAL WITH PUBLISHERS"

The author's wife, Catherine Dickens (née Hogarth), pictured as a young woman

encouraged him to marry Catherine Hogarth, three years his junior, daughter of a Scots journalist. But it was his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, which began publication in serial form that same year, that marked the beginnings of a stellar literary career.

Dickens moved into his first house, 48 Doughty Street, Bloomsbury, in 1837 (nowadays the Charles Dickens Museum). He worked at a frenetic pace, and was constantly searching for the best deal with his publishers. He even began writing the first parts of *Oliver Twist* (1837) before he had completed *The Pickwick Papers*. His early novels *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) would demonstrate his social conscience: the former drawing attention to conditions in the recently introduced prison-like Union workhouses; the latter to the Yorkshire 'schools' which boarded neglected children in dire conditions. Unwanted and ill-treated children would become a theme in his novels, perhaps rooted in his own sense of abandonment at the blacking factory. The tragic sudden death of his sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, at Doughty Street, likewise influenced his fiction – particularly his portrait of the patient, benign Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840). Dickens wrote Mary's epitaph – "Young, beautiful and good. God in his mercy numbered her among his angels at the early age of seventeen".

The grave of Dickens's sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth. Her premature death had a profound impact on the author

UNFLATTERING PORTRAITS

Dickens moved house again in 1839, to Devonshire Terrace, a much grander property, opposite Regent's Park. His fame was now international, and in 1842 he undertook a lengthy American tour. He was not entirely pleased with what he discovered there, writing to a friend, "this is not the republic of my imagination". The issue of slavery, the cynicism of the press, and the more personal issue of international copyright (plagiarism of his work was rife) somewhat tainted the trip. He also grew tired of the ever-present crowds of admirers. This discomfort was documented in his travelogue *American Notes*, published the same year, which, like his subsequent novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), contained

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ABOVE: Dickens shown seated in a carriage with Catherine and two of the couple's daughters, c1850
RIGHT: In 1857, the author embarked on an affair with the young actress Ellen Ternan, pictured here aged 19

rather unflattering portraits of American life. Dickens meanwhile, known for his boundless energy, was soon planning another trip, taking his family on a lengthy grand tour of Italy in 1844–45, writing another travelogue and, again, working the experience into his fiction in *Little Dorrit* (1855).

The family moved to another substantial London property, Tavistock House, in 1851. During this decade, apart from writing his novels and journalism, Dickens also founded his own magazine, *Household Words* (1850), featuring a mixture of non-fiction and serial fiction, including his own *Hard Times* (1854). Another creative outlet during the 1850s was his passion for amateur dramatics, which he pursued with characteristic energy and enthusiasm. In May 1851, he even took part in a charitable performance of the comedy *Not So Bad as We Seem* for Queen Victoria. During the staging of another bout of charitable theatricals in 1857, Dickens met the 18-year-old actress Ellen Ternan – and began a clandestine relationship.

Rumours of Dickens's affair began to circulate the following year, including in his own club, the Garrick. Horrified, he decided to separate from his wife and penned a public letter, damning their marriage as unhappy, and claiming that Catherine had abandoned her maternal duties to her sister Georgina, who lived with the family as their housekeeper. He stated that Catherine had a mental disorder and felt herself "unfit for the life she had to lead as my wife". But, in truth, it seems more likely that he had grown tired of a blameless woman who had borne him 10 children, lost her youthful looks, and increasingly suffered from depression. Dickens retreated to his new home in Gads Hill, Kent, and – despite the gossip and scandal – his social status was not much diminished.

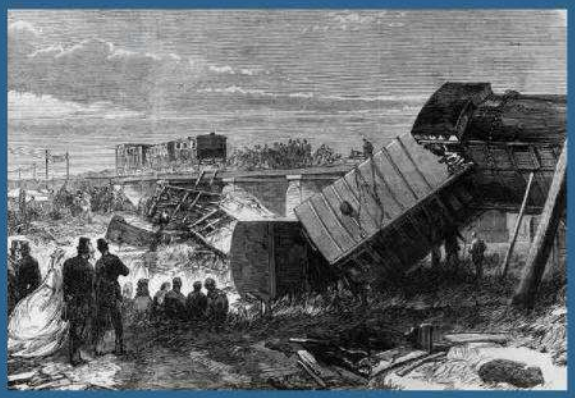
THE FINAL FAREWELL

His final years were marked by a hectic schedule of public readings, both in England and America, which left him increasingly exhausted. By 1870, he had to be helped from the stage by a medical attendant, and revived with a glass of brandy. The most popular of these dramatic performances was 'Sikes and Nancy' in which he voiced both killer and victim. He joked with a correspondent that he was "nightly murdered by Mr W Sikes" – and these public appearances undoubtedly took a toll on his constitution. After his final show in March 1870, he accepted repeated encores, thanked the enthusiastic handkerchief-waving audience and returned to his dressing room, "with quite a mournful gait, and tears rolling down his cheeks". Dickens died at his home in Kent, three months later, on 9 June 1870, leaving his novel in progress, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished.

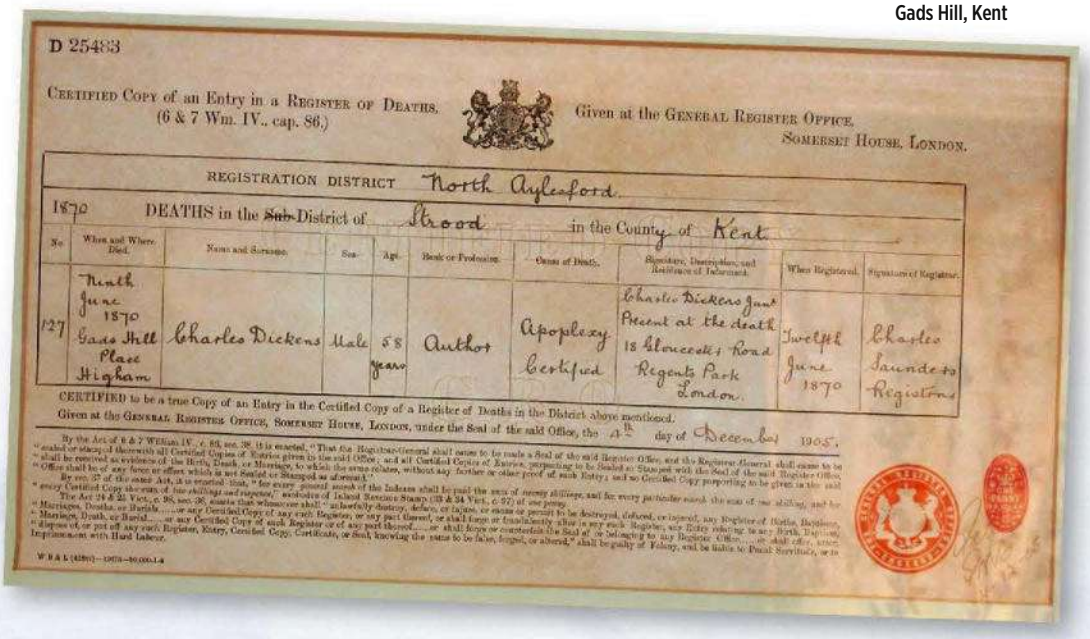
A BRUSH WITH DEATH

The author's experience of a fatal rail crash left him with deep mental scars

Dickens was travelling with his mistress, Ellen Ternan, and her mother, when on 9 June 1865, he found himself embroiled in a disaster. Their train, returning to London from Folkestone, derailed at high speed near the town of Staplehurst. Ten passengers were killed but Dickens was sufficiently unharmed and self-composed to give assistance to the injured. He also recovered the manuscript of the latest instalment of *Our Mutual Friend* from the wreckage. The crash, however, left him with what would probably now be described as PTSD when travelling at speed – "sudden vague rushes of terror" – even when in a horse-drawn cab. Nor could he bring himself to ride a horse or drive a carriage ever again. The after-effects of this experience contributed to his declining physical health in the late 1860s.



The Staplehurst rail crash, depicted here in an engraving published in *The Illustrated London News*, claimed the lives of 10 passengers



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CERTIFIED COPY of an Entry in a REGISTER OF DEATHS. (6 & 7 Wm. IV., cap. 86.)

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON.

REGISTRATION DISTRICT North Aylesford.

1870 DEATHS in the ~~Sub~~-District of Strood in the County of Kent

No.	When and Where Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.
127	Ninth June 1870 Gads Hill Place Higham	Charles Dickens	Male	58 years	Author	Apoplexy Certified	Charles Dickens Jun^r Present at the death 18 Gloucester Road Regents Park London.	Twelfth June 1870	Charles Saunders Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true Copy of an Entry in the Certified Copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON, under the Seal of the said Office, the 4th day of December 1905.

The author's death certificate shows that he died of apoplexy (a stroke) at his home in Gads Hill, Kent

The Mystery of Edwin Drood, unfinished.

DR LEE JACKSON is a writer and historian with an interest in the social history and geography of Victorian London. His most recent book is *Dickensland: The Curious History of Dickens's London* (Yale, 2023)

GET HOOKED

LISTEN
Dr Lee Jackson discusses life in Charles Dickens's London on a recent episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast. Stream it now at *historyextra.com/dickens-london-pod*

A JOURNEY THROUGH DICKENS'S LONDON

The works of Charles Dickens are synonymous with visions of Victorian London. We talk to **Dr Lee Jackson** about the author's love of the capital, and the locations that most inspired him

Q: How has Charles Dickens become so intrinsically linked with London?

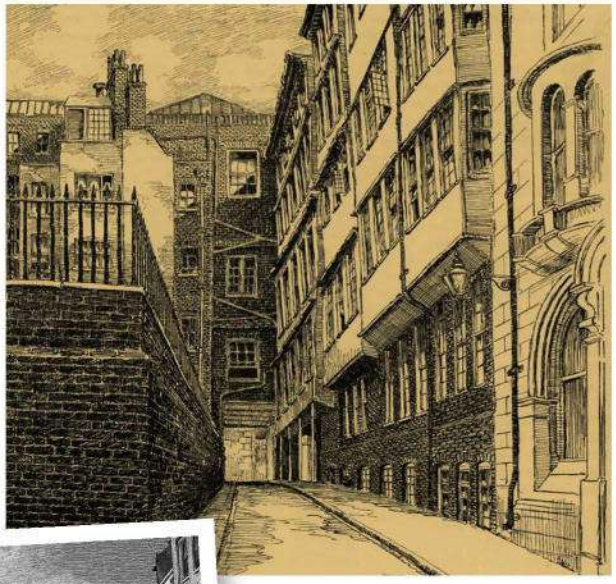
A: Dickens is *the* London writer. He was described by one critic in the mid-19th century as "a special correspondent for posterity". He writes in such detail, and he walked through the city looking for locations for his books in the same way that people might scout for film locations today.

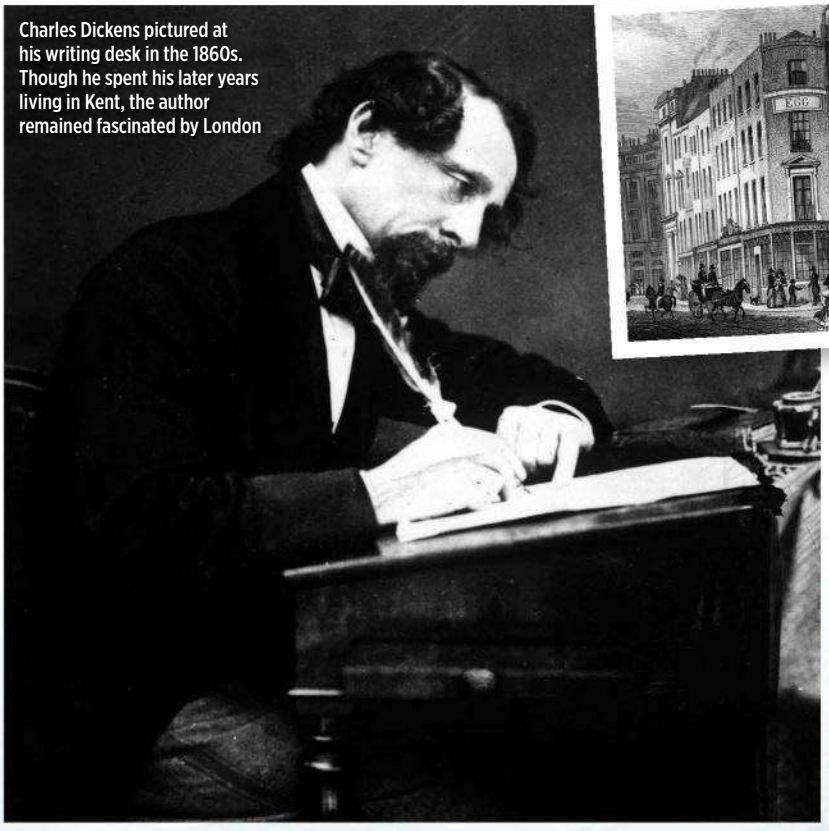
He's an intensely visual writer. He goes from the biggest panoramas of London life – like fog sweeping across the River Thames – to the smallest possible details. We think of his world in very visual terms, and I think that draws people in.

Q: Why do you think Dickens's London has captured people's imaginations?

A: Dickens lived at the cusp of modernity, in a city that was both ancient and rapidly changing. He picks on aspects of Old London in his works – the city churchyards, the inns of court, the law courts – at a time when new bridges, new roads, and even new sewer networks were starting to appear. He was fascinated seeing the old city disappearing and the new coming in. I think that also chimes with our experience of London over the past two centuries.

My latest book, *Dickensland: The Curious History of Dickens's London*, is all about Dickens tourism, and we've got this remarkable history of 150 years of people going back to Dickens and trying to find the places in his books [*see pages 32–35*]. That quest obviously has great appeal, and I suppose I've been trying to fathom what that appeal is.





Charles Dickens pictured at his writing desk in the 1860s. Though he spent his later years living in Kent, the author remained fascinated by London

TOP: **An illustration of the narrow lane that runs alongside the Middle Temple – one of London's four Inns of Court. The Inn is mentioned in *Martin Chuzzlewit***

BOTTOM: **A Victorian view of Piccadilly. The hopeless optimist Wilkins Micawber imagines his family living at a property on the street in *David Copperfield***

Q: What sort of places was he most inspired by?

A: Dickens was very interested in pubs and shops – in shared, public places that had a sense of history. Indeed, there's a great piece in *Sketches by Boz* [a collection of short pieces that Dickens published in various newspapers and magazines between 1833–36], in which he traces the history of a London shop through six or seven different iterations. He talks about its decay and how it ends; it's a school at one point, then it becomes a shop, and then a private house. He loved seeing these buildings change through history. He also thought quaint places, like old inns, stirred the imagination.

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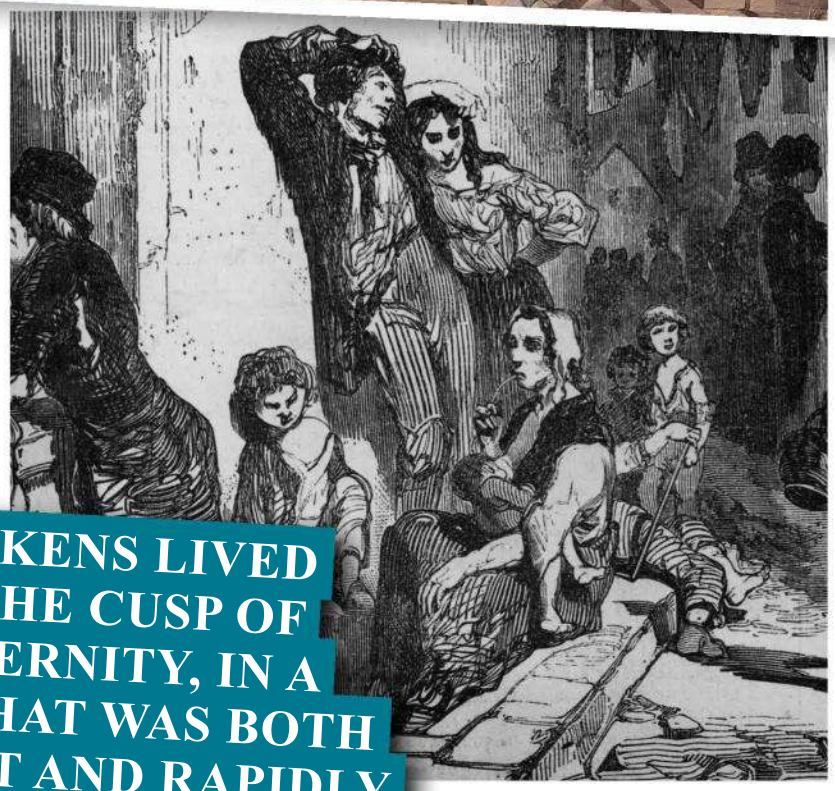
An illustration by George Cruikshank depicts Nancy's fateful meeting on London Bridge in *Oliver Twist*



"DICKENS LIVED AT THE CUSP OF MODERNITY, IN A CITY THAT WAS BOTH ANCIENT AND RAPIDLY CHANGING"

One of the places I'm particularly interested in is London Bridge [*see page 35*]. There's a famous scene in Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* in which Nancy, a prostitute who is kindly towards the hero, Oliver, gives away the secrets of Fagin and Bill Sikes to Mr Brownlow. She does it at a meeting on London Bridge, of all places. It's almost like a fairy story. She says she'll be there every Sunday night, "from eleven until the clock strikes twelve".

At the time, London Bridge was a very new bridge, built in 1831 by John Rennie as a grand, sweeping statement about the modernity of London. In the book, however, Dickens mixes that with hints of the old medieval London Bridge, and there's this great tension between the past and the present. In a sense, the criminal class that Nancy belongs to is part of the past, while Mr Brownlow is part of the present. There's some great gloomy gothic detail poured in there as well – the past is a dark and miserable place in Dickens.

He also chooses London Bridge as a location in the novel because there was a time you could see both the old medieval bridge and the new one side-by-side. They didn't actually demolish the old bridge until its replacement had been fully built. I think this inspired him.

Q: What about the less salubrious locations? Was Dickens actually going to these areas of London, or was his vision of this underworld more of a middle-class fantasy?

A: I think it was a bit of both. He was certainly aware of previous authors on the subject, like Pierce Egan (1772–1849), who wrote these Regency-era stories that went right across London, sampling everything from the dirtiest pubs in Wapping to the fanciest ballrooms of the West End.

Dickens played with familiar ideas of these underworld locations, but he was absolutely going out and visiting them as well. In the late 1840s, Dickens became friends with a police officer named Charles Frederick Field, who took him out to Seven Dials and St Giles – home to the worst slums in central London. These visits formed the basis of a journalistic piece he wrote called *On Duty with Inspector Field*, which was published in 1851. These areas now form part of the Covent Garden shopping district, but a middle-class person in Dickens's era would not have ventured there at night unless they had a police escort.

TOP: **For a while, two different incarnations of London Bridge existed side by side, with the structure on the left eventually replacing its medieval predecessor in 1831**

BOTTOM: **A depiction of poverty in the St Giles Rookery – regarded as one of the worst slums in Britain. Dickens personally paid a visit, assisted by a police officer**

Later, in the 1860s, Dickens wrote about an opium den in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which was actually based on a real opium den in Blue Gate Fields, in London's East End. It became a sort of 'celebrity' opium den that everyone went to see – it even had the Prince of Wales popping in to have a look.

Ultimately, there was a sort of blurring between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' slum stories in the 19th century, partly because of people like Dickens, who publicised such places in their works. Nevertheless, his exploration of the seedier sides of the capital – in books like *Oliver Twist* or *Bleak House* – were ground-breaking. A lot of the serious social investigation tied to 19th-century government reform borrowed ideas from Dickens, trying to not only relate facts but evoke sympathy for the poor.

Turn the page for details of eight London locations associated with Dickens tourism...

Continues on page 32

8 LONDON LOCATIONS LINKED TO DICKENS

We ask **Dr Lee Jackson** about the sights that have attracted Dickens tourists to the capital – from the Victorian age to the present day

As the 19th century reached its final decades, Victorians became increasingly fascinated with the history of London. Charles Dickens's work played a huge part in this, as people embraced the idea that the capital might contain hidden historic gems, including locations featured in the writer's novels – places that once upon a time would not have been considered of note.

According to Dr Lee Jackson, Dickensian tourism was also different from the literary tourism previously associated with the Lake District and William Wordsworth or Scotland and Walter Scott in that it didn't really occur during the writer's own lifetime.

After Dickens's death in 1870, Victorians began looking beyond palaces and castles, and took an interest in the smaller places: pubs, houses and locales that didn't even necessarily have famous names attached to them.

"Dickensian London was the back alley, it was the local pub," explains Jackson. "And people started to see them in a different way. There was a heritage boom at the end of the 19th century, and Dickens tourism figures in that."

The Charles Dickens Museum at 48 Doughty Street, the London home of Charles Dickens from 1837–39, is undoubtedly the best place to start for any fans who want to explore his life and work through London landmarks. But there are plenty of other sites that have stories to tell.

Here, Jackson tells us about eight London locations that became – for better or worse – Dickensian tourism hotspots...

ABOVE: **Dickens's home at 48 Doughty Street, Camden, is now the Charles Dickens Museum**

LEFT: **A view inside the house's master bedroom**

13 JOHNSON STREET, CAMDEN

In 1824, the author's father, John Dickens, was imprisoned for debt. After three months, he got out of gaol thanks to receiving an inheritance when his mother died – a "very Dickensian turn of events," notes Jackson.

The family then moved to Camden, which was just on the outer limits of north London at the time, to a road called Johnson Street. Charles Dickens subsequently lived there with his family from 1824, when he was 12 years old, to around 1829 or 1830.

"It was a little terraced house, and it wasn't the most salubrious area," says Jackson. "I did some research into who else was there at the time and there was, for instance, a laundress a few doors down doing people's washing for them.

"It never got so much recognition during Dickens's lifetime, or immediately after his death: Dickens biographer John Forster [whose book *The Life of Charles Dickens* was published in the early 1870s] writes about a different house in Bayham Street in Camden, which they were at for a much shorter time, and that got much more romanticised. Johnson Street, where they'd been for five years, was almost forgotten."

However, in the 1920s, explains Jackson, an American reverend named John Brett Langstaff seized upon a plaque that had been fixed onto this Johnson Street house by the London County Council "and had a rather odd idea". Langstaff suggested that the building, which was in a slum state and very decrepit, could be transformed into a children's library.

"The David Copperfield Children's Library was intended to be a beacon for the poor children of Camden, because it was a very poor district at the time," says Jackson. "It had a Victorian feel to it. For instance, when the children went in, they all had to be washed to avoid any kind of infestation coming in with them. And they all had to wear a smock so that they didn't damage any of the books."

For around four or five years, Dickens's childhood home functioned in this way – "one of those little outbursts of Dickensian enthusiasm," says Jackson. The house was eventually demolished in the 1930s to make way for flats.

One of Dickens's boyhood homes, 13 Johnson Street, became a children's library. It was torn down in the 1930s

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THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

In Dickens tourism, explains Jackson, there's a mixture of the authentic and the wishful thinking – and then the downright fictional.

"The prime example of that, which is largely forgotten these days, but was very popular in the early 20th century, is The Old Curiosity Shop. It's a Tudor building in Lincoln's Inn Fields, now part of the London School of Economics campus. It's this small, rickety building, with a sloping tiled roof and the floor sinking below the modern-day pavement."

It's a few hundred years old, and on the front, says Jackson, it has 'The Old Curiosity Shop' in gothic writing, followed by the words 'immortalised by Charles Dickens'. However, it has absolutely nothing to do with the author.

"In the 1870s, every owner of an antique shop or old clothes shop called their business 'The Old Curiosity Shop' because they knew it appealed to passing tourists. But the owner of *this* particular shop had the genius of adding 'immortalised by Charles Dickens' – and people loved it. It's been a Dickensian destination, for better or worse, for about 150 years, despite having no known connection to Dickens or the book. In fact, at the end of the book, Dickens says the shop in question has been demolished to make way for street improvements."

It's not so well-known today, but Jackson says that it used to enjoy a similar level of popularity to the Tower of London – especially among visiting American tourists.

A MAP OF DICKENS'S LONDON

Discover where each of the locations in this guide were, or still are, located

ABOVE LEFT: **The Old Curiosity Shop in Lincoln's Inn Fields has no connection to the novel of the same name – but that hasn't stopped tourists from visiting it**

The Old Hall at Lincoln's Inn. The hall served as the seat of the Court of Chancery – an equity court that plays a key role in *Bleak House*

LINCOLN'S INN

In England and Wales, all aspiring barristers must join one of London's four Inns of Court before they can complete their vocational training. Dickens was fascinated by the traditions of these historic legal institutions, and they are a feature of several of his novels.

All four of the inns – Lincoln's Inn, Gray's Inn, the Middle Temple and the Inner Temple – are open to the public at selected times, but Jackson recommends visiting Lincoln's Inn in Holborn and taking a tour of the medieval Old Hall.

The room (which is not to be confused with the newer Great Hall, erected in the 19th century), is the site of the Court of Chancery in the opening chapter of *Bleak House*, where the case of Jarndyce v Jarndyce is heard. Later, the BBC's 1985 adaptation of the novel used the same room for filming.

The gateway of St Olave's Church, visited by Dickens, boasts a trio of carved skulls

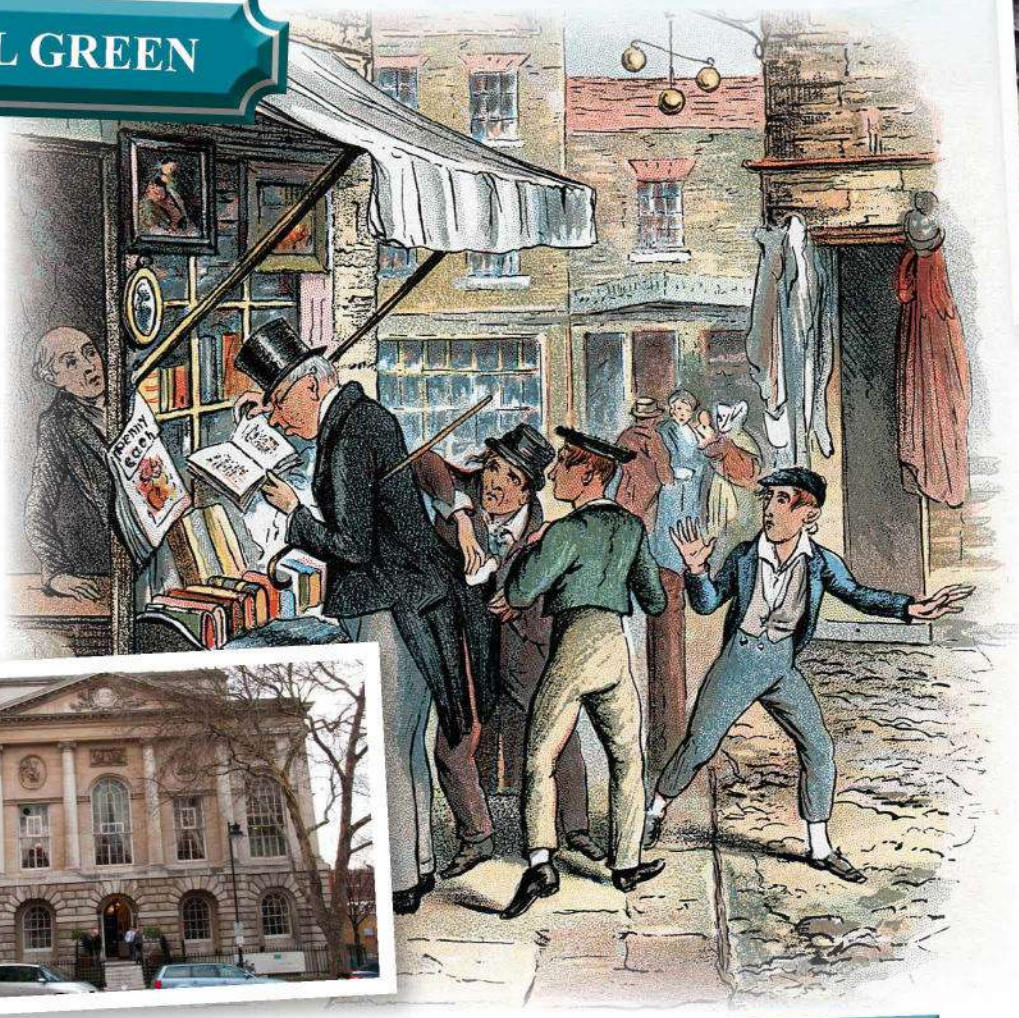
CLERKENWELL GREEN

In Clerkenwell Green, you might find echoes of *Oliver Twist*, perhaps reminded of a scene in which Oliver sees the Artful Dodger picking someone's pockets and realises what sort of company he has fallen into, followed by a memorable pursuit through the streets.

"Contrary to what you might read in some places, you can't find the specific bookshop [the fictional pickpocketing] happened at," explains Jackson. "But the green itself still has this very historic feel."

"The Old Sessions House is still there – the great courthouse that would have dominated the green in the 19th century. One of the reasons that Dickens sets that scene there is because it has this criminality happening under the very eyes of one of the greatest courthouses in London."

Follow the streets around there, towards Islington and the Angel, says Jackson, and you'll find a labyrinth with plenty of sights that evoke the world of Dickens.



RIGHT: **Clerkenwell Green is overlooked by what used to be one of London's great courthouses**

FAR RIGHT: **A pivotal scene in *Oliver Twist* takes place nearby**

MARSHALSEA PRISON

The notorious Marshalsea Prison in Southwark, where Dickens's father was imprisoned for debt in 1824, closed in 1842. Nevertheless, its memory lives on in Dickens's works, notably *Little Dorrit*, in which it serves as the home of the novel's protagonist, Amy Dorrit. Overall, London's four debtors' prisons (the others were Whitecross Street, Fleet Street and King's Bench) loomed large in Dickens's imagination, and appear in other books including *David Copperfield* and *The Pickwick Papers*.

Of Marshalsea, there's only a wall left, says Jackson, "but there's a plaque and various other small things laid into the pavement there to remind you about Dickens." These can be seen in a narrow lane named Angel Place, close to the church of St George the Martyr.

BUT, WHOSOEVER GOES INTO MARSHALSEA
PRISON, ON THE VERY PAVING-STONES OF THE
COURT-YARD, AND WILL STAND STILL AND
LISTEN, MAY HEAR THE GHOSTS OF MANY
MISERABLE YEARS

LEFT: **A quote from *Little Dorrit* can be found next to the site of Marshalsea Prison**

FAR LEFT: **The only surviving remnant of the prison is one of its outer walls**

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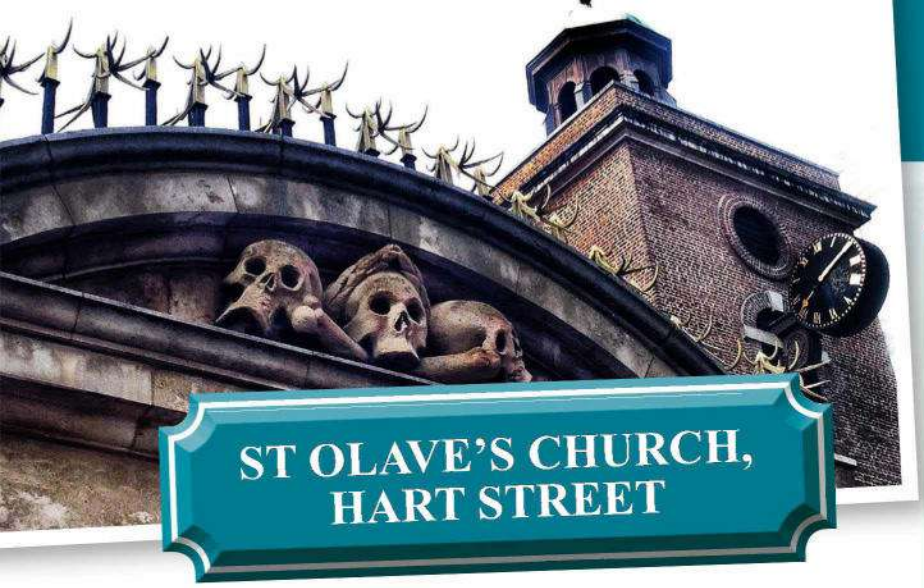


ST OLAVE'S CHURCH, HART STREET

Keen tourists of Dickensian London will want to pay a visit to St Olave's Church in Hart Street, near the Tower of London.

"It's not in the novels," explains Jackson, "but it does appear in one of Dickens's great pieces of journalism – an 1863 essay entitled *The City of the Absent* – in which he's investigating the decaying world of the City of London. Its residents were leaving in droves and it was becoming the commercial centre it is today."

Despite surviving the Great Fire of London in 1666, St Olave's Church was in a state of decline by the time that Dickens decided to write about it.

"He calls it 'Saint Ghastly Grim'," explains Jackson, "partly because of the state of the churchyard, which was neglected and overgrown and foul.

"But also – and you can see this today, if you look at the gateway – it has these carved stone skulls, which are meant to be *memento mori*, there to remind you of your own mortality."

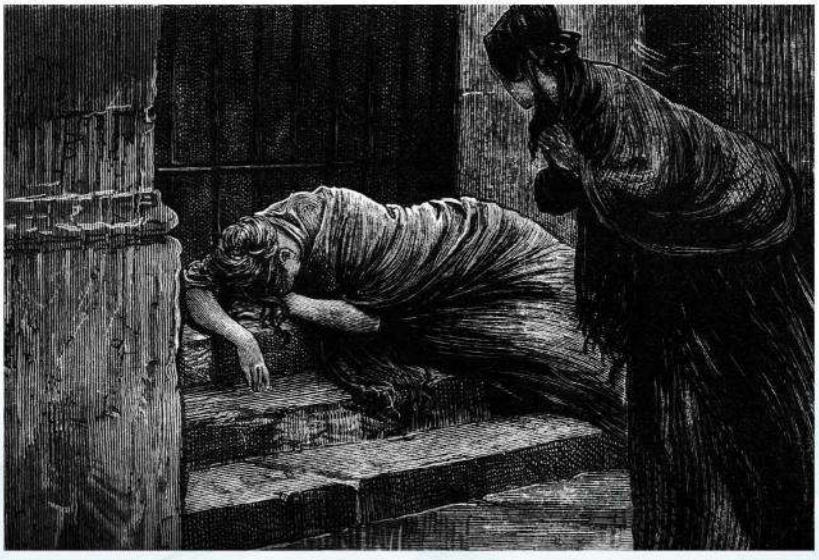
RUSSELL COURT BURIAL GROUND

The long-demolished Russell Court burial ground, located a short distance from the Strand, was the inspiration for the burial ground in *Bleak House*.

"It's in several scenes in the book," explains Jackson. "Towards the end, Lady Dedlock, a crucial character, dies on the burial ground steps."

From the 1870s onwards, the site was also depicted in a popular West End play, and people "flocked" there to see what it was really like – despite being located, says Jackson, in "a slummy network of alleys just south of Drury Lane Theatre".

The burial ground was cleared at the end of the 19th century to make way for new housing, and no traces remain today.



The burial ground at which Lady Dedlock dies in *Bleak House* was modelled on a real location

'NANCY'S STEPS'

MAIN: **These steps, leading up to London Bridge, have been incorrectly linked with Nancy in *Oliver Twist***

BELOW RIGHT: **The error even features on a nearby plaque**

These steps and arch are surviving fragments of the 1831 London Bridge designed by John Rennie and built by his son Sir John Rennie.
These steps were the scene of the murder of Nancy in Charles Dickens' novel Oliver Twist.

"If you go to Southwark Cathedral and look at the set of steps that leads from the cathedral up to London Bridge, you'll see a plaque which claims that they are Nancy's Steps – where Nancy is murdered in *Oliver Twist*," says Jackson. "Now the main problem with that is that Nancy is not actually murdered on the steps – she's murdered at home in a case of domestic violence." Jackson instead supposes that the plaque mistakenly refers to Nancy's fate in the 1968 film *Oliver!*, rather than the original Dickens novel.

A set of steps leading down from London Bridge *does* play a key role in the novel (it's where Nancy secretly meets Mr Brownlow), but it's found in a slightly different location. "The steps in the book are a wide set of landing stairs that go right down to the riverside, whereas the steps near the plaque come back to the cathedral in the opposite direction.

"You can still find the 'real' Nancy's Steps if you go up to the top of London Bridge, next to the parapet, and peer down on the western side at low tide. There, you can see two or three of the original steps remaining."

INTERVIEW: ELLIE CAWTHORNE
WORDS: ELINOR EVANS

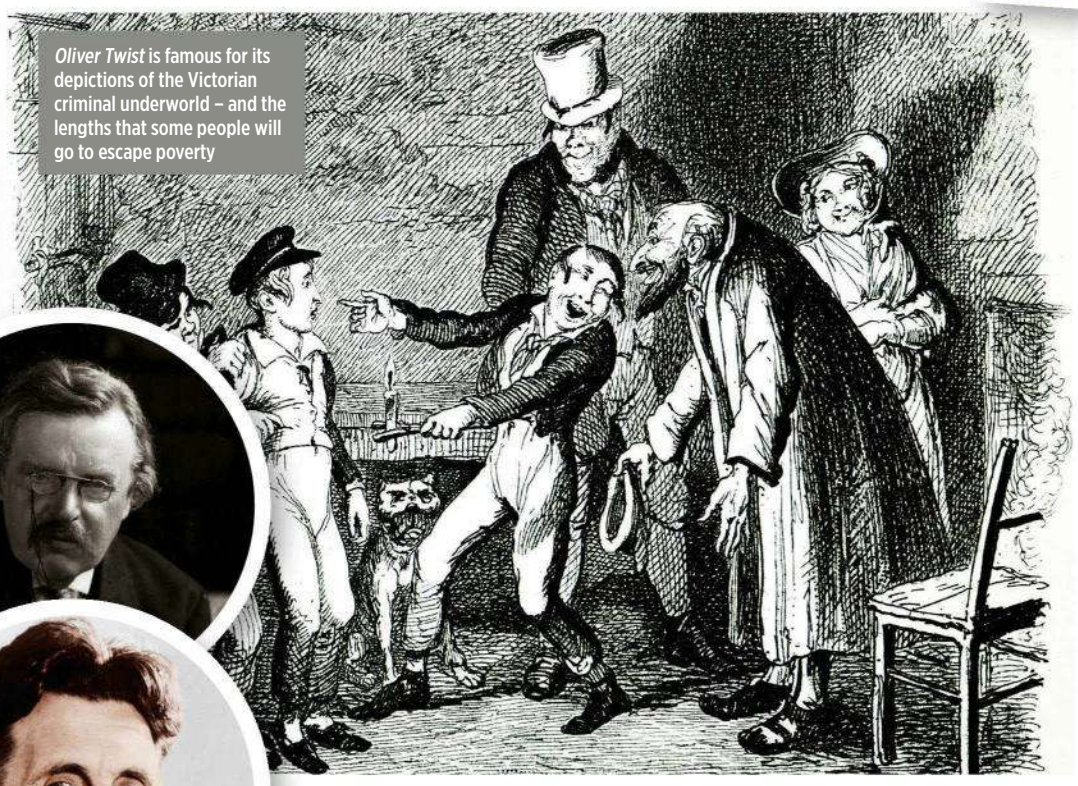
DR LEE JACKSON is a writer and historian with an interest in the social history and geography of Victorian London. His most recent book is *Dickensland: The Curious History of Dickens's London* (Yale, 2023)

GET HOOKED

LISTEN
Dr Lee Jackson discusses Charles Dickens's London on a recent episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast. Stream it at *historyextra.com/dickens-london-pod*

GIVING THE POOR A VOICE

From *Hard Times* to *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens used his pen to help illuminate the lives of the less fortunate



Oliver Twist is famous for its depictions of the Victorian criminal underworld – and the lengths that some people will go to escape poverty

On Charles Dickens's death in 1870, an epitaph circulated around London declaring the late novelist to be "a sympathiser with the poor, the suffering and the oppressed". Such a tribute was not without reason. His works remain synonymous with the lower end of Victorian society, a landscape inhabited by orphans, factory workers, prostitutes and those fallen on hard times. Dickens gave them a voice, gave them dignity. And that legacy prevailed. Several decades later, the critic GK Chesterton labelled Dickens "the spokesman of the poor". Many believed his novels had partially reset the political and social agenda.

CLASS CRITICISM

Not everyone, though. George Orwell was among the sharpest critics when it came to Dickens's actual dedication to social reform. Orwell observed that most of the action in the novels takes place in middle-class settings that feature "the London commercial bourgeoisie and their hangers-on". The truly poor, claimed Orwell, were neglected by the novelist. "He has no portrait of an agricultural worker, and only one (Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*) of an industrial worker." Writing in the 1930s, Orwell contended that "if you ask any ordinary reader which of Dickens's proletarian characters he can remember, the three he is almost certain to mention are Bill Sikes, Sam Weller and Mrs Gamp. A burglar, a valet and a drunken midwife – not exactly a representative cross-section of the English working class."

Orwell went further, decrying Dickens for not being a sufficiently revolutionary writer. Despite his popular image as a champion of the poor, he didn't call for the restructuring of society to create a more equitable climate. "In reality, his target is not so much society as 'human nature'," Orwell argued. "His whole 'message' is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently, the world would be decent."

TOP: **The critic GK Chesterton described Charles Dickens as "the spokesman of the poor"**

ABOVE: **Later, George Orwell would criticise Dickens's portrayal of working-class people**

RIGHT: **Stephen Blackpool, who meets a tragic end in *Hard Times*, is the sole noteworthy industrial worker in the author's many novels**

Despite the absence of the attributes and determinations listed by Orwell, Dickens was immensely popular with the poor, even the illiterate members of society who would pay to have the new instalment of his latest work read to them. By locating a fair proportion of his books' scenes in down-at-heel settings familiar to them, Dickens encouraged an appetite for serious fiction that had once passed this new audience by.

And Dickens knew the places he wrote about. Unlike Orwell the Old Etonian, he

GETTY IMAGES X7, ALAMY X3

LEFT: **The alcoholic midwife Sarah Gamp depicted enjoying a drink with her friend in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Dickens's portrayal of Gamp did not impress the likes of George Orwell**

BELOW: ***Barnaby Rudge* sees its central character duped into joining a mob during the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots**

had more direct experience of living in straitened times. In 1824, overwhelmed by mounting debts, his father John, a naval clerk, was sent to a debtors' prison, where he was joined by his wife and their younger children. Twelve-year-old Charles lived in a series of lodgings across the city instead; he would later draw upon his landlords and landladies when populating his novels with salt-of-the-earth Londoners.

He was also forced to work 10-hour days in a blacking warehouse – "a crazy, tumble-down old house… overrun with rats" – attaching labels to pots of boot polish. This experience, relocated to a bottling factory, would be revisited in *David Copperfield*. There he worked alongside poor working-class children, including one 'Bob Fagin' – a name he would borrow in *Oliver Twist* – giving him a youthful insight into a wholly different side of society.

Dickens undeniably showed immense empathy to the working poor and to those in the bottom echelons of society struggling to better themselves in a rigged system, whether that be orphaned children or women, such as the prostitute Nancy in *Oliver Twist*. This regard and concern didn't extend to ne'er-do-wells resorting to crime to survive, if not prosper at the expense of others. He was no admirer of the mob, seen in his portrayal of the rioters – participating in the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780 – in *Barnaby Rudge*. "[I]nfuriated with liquor," the rioters operated "with no more settled design than that of doing as much mischief as they could."

"DICKENS'S WORK SHONE A BRIGHT LIGHT INTO THE DARKER, MURKIER CORNERS OF ENGLISH SOCIETY"

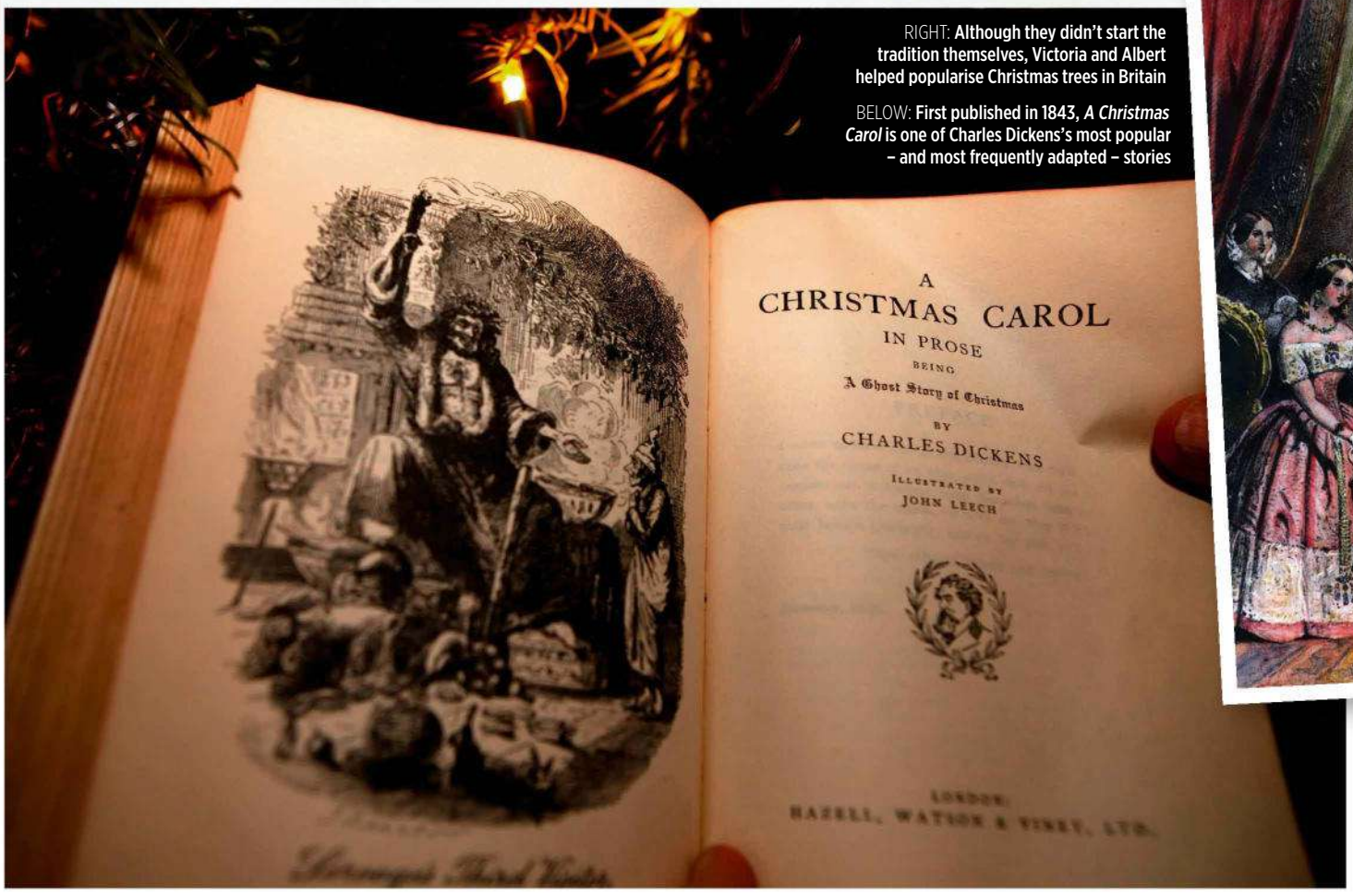
DIRT AND SQUALOR

Whatever his perceived failings when populating his novels with those from the poorest sections of society, and whatever his perceived failings he may have shown in his failure to offer solutions to help eradicate poverty, Dickens's work nonetheless shone a bright light into the darker, murkier corners of English – and, most commonly, London – society.

These were corners all too easily ignored by Dickens's contemporaries. His fiction ventures into neighbourhoods never visited by the pens of others. See here the real-life area of Jacob's Island on the south bank of the Thames, described in the pages of *Oliver Twist* as containing homes "so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem to be too tainted even for the dirt and squalor".

At their absolute very least, the works of Charles Dickens offered many of his contemporary readers a stimulating introduction to a strata of society otherwise invisible to them, a hidden world. His novels may not have led to social reform on the level that has commonly been perceived, but his artistic output certainly pointed the collective gaze towards the societal ills of Victorian England.

WORDS: NIGE TASSELL



RIGHT: **Although they didn't start the tradition themselves, Victoria and Albert helped popularise Christmas trees in Britain**

BELOW: **First published in 1843, *A Christmas Carol* is one of Charles Dickens's most popular – and most frequently adapted – stories**

REVIVING THE FESTIVE SPIRIT

A Christmas Carol wasn't just a bestseller – it changed the way that Britons chose to mark the festive season

Contrary to popular belief, Charles Dickens didn't invent Christmas. However, by the time he sat down to write *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, the observing of the festive season in Britain was, at the very least, not the great festival celebrated in its medieval heyday. What the tremendous success of *A Christmas Carol* did – alongside Prince Albert gifting the young Queen Victoria a spruce fir for a Christmas tree three years earlier – was to both revive and reinvent the festivities in this country, returning it towards a level of popularity enjoyed across continental Europe, particularly in Albert's native Germany.

CHANGING OPINIONS

In observing the unrelenting and often debilitating effects of the Industrial Revolution on the British workforce, Dickens understood the potential of Christmas to be a pressure valve for the population's working lives, a punctuation mark around which the next 12 months might revolve. Through the effervescent Fred in *A Christmas Carol*, he described Christmas as "the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys". At a turn, Dickens had redefined the spirit of Christmas. Any real-life dissenters reading the book would have their opinions on the festivities reversed thanks to the moral lessons of its three ghosts, much as Dickens's pen would overturn the outlook of one of his most enduring creations, Fred's uncle Ebenezer Scrooge.

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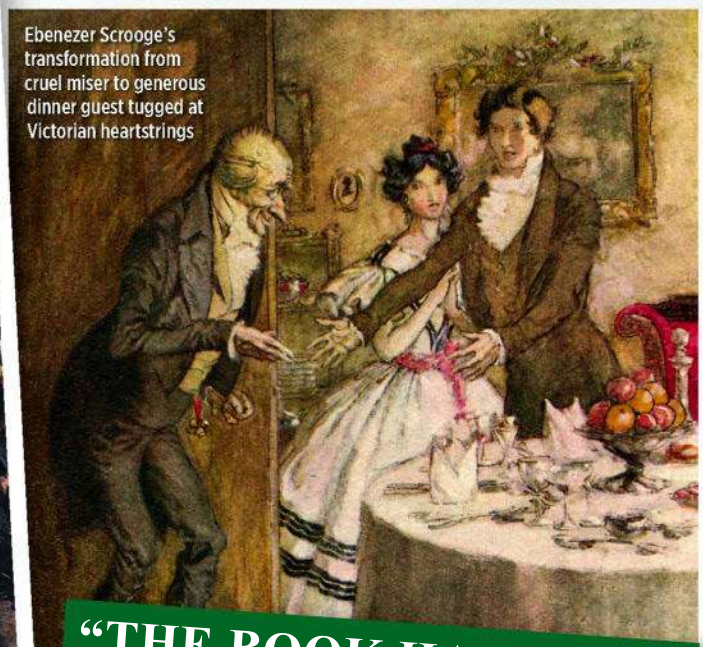


Ebenezer Scrooge's transformation from cruel miser to generous dinner guest tugged at Victorian heartstrings

"THE BOOK HAD TO BE REPRINTED NO FEWER THAN EIGHT TIMES IN THE FOLLOWING SIX MONTHS"

The critic GK Chesterton later wrote that "whether the Christmas visions would or would not convert Scrooge, they convert us". The book's message was irresistible. So persuasive were Dickens's words and sentiment that the historian Thomas Carlyle hosted two Christmas dinners at his home. Similarly, Robert Louis Stevenson announced, once he'd turned the last page, that he would be donating some of his income to charities aiding the poor.

AN INSTANT CLASSIC

A Christmas Carol was partly written out of economic necessity – Dickens's latest novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* was selling badly, his finances faltering. But it was also a response to a recent government report on exploitative child labour – an appeal for sympathy with the poor. The public, as it turned out, was deeply touched by its mixture of ghost story, moral cautionary tale and seasonal feel-good factor. Published in the week before the Christmas of 1843 and priced at five shillings, the book was an instant and massive hit, and had to be reprinted no fewer than eight times in the following six months. It sold strongly all year round, even during the hot, sticky months of summer, a meteorological world away from the snowy streets of December.

Buoyed by its phenomenal success, Dickens soon fully understood that writing about this particular festive season had hit a rich seam of public popularity. He wrote a further four Christmas-themed books, as well as producing an annual special Christmas edition of his two-penny magazine *Household Words*, inviting writer contemporaries to contribute, among them Elizabeth Gaskell and Wilkie Collins.

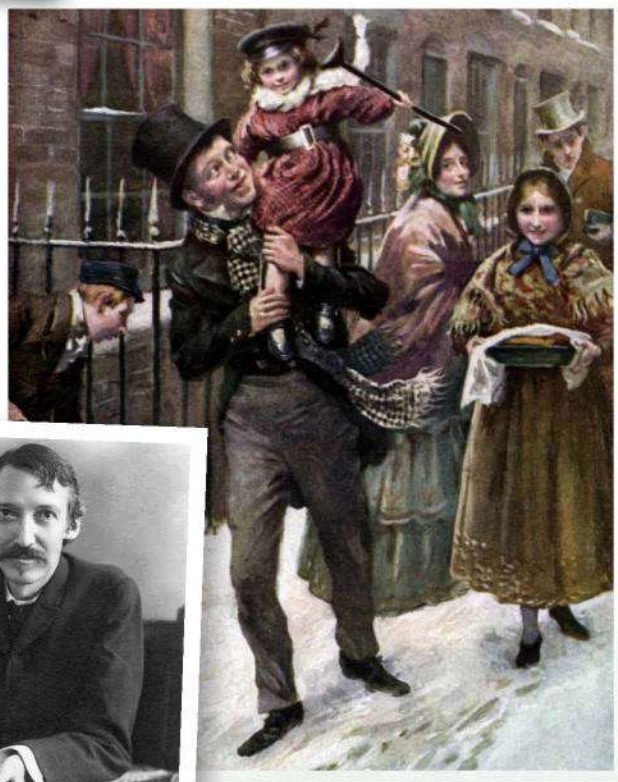
But it was *A Christmas Carol* that did most of the heavy lifting, its ultimately heart-warming nature chiming with generation after generation over the 180 years since it made its first appearance. Dickens's portrayal of a snowbound yuletide was almost certainly forged by the eight exceedingly cold winters that the young Dickens enjoyed as a boy. It doesn't take a psychologist to understand why the novelist returned to these particular winters for inspiration; they were the last he experienced before his family was thrown into turmoil by his father's imprisonment for debt. He was clearly searching for something himself, reaching back to the memories of his own Christmases past.

The atmosphere conjured up by *A Christmas Carol* – snowballs and holly and mistletoe and geese and game and punch – might have been undeniably nostalgic and idealised, but it's one that's endured ever since. Since those early years of the Victorian era, the collective notion of the romance of Christmas has leaned heavily on Dickens's portrayal, one that used the festive season to step outside the drudgery and grind of people's everyday existence.

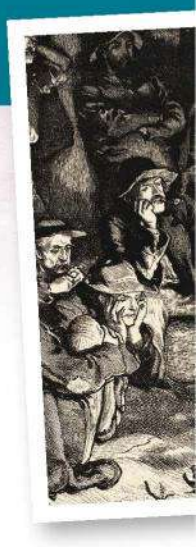
He might not have originated the concept of Christmas, but Charles John Huffam Dickens was surely the man who resurrected it – even if his primary motivation had been to write a book successful enough for him to provide for his family. Not only did his ghost story about a won-over sceptic critically alter the path of his stuttering writing career, it also very much guided the season of goodwill into the modern age, influencing almost every portrayal ever since.

He wrote of the reformed Scrooge that "it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well". That was true of the author too. Dickens is Christmas. Christmas is Dickens.

WORDS: NIGE TASSELL



Reading about the plight of Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim (*above*) encouraged some people to donate money to charity – including *Treasure Island* author Robert Louis Stevenson (*left*)



THE AUTHOR GOES ABROAD

Dickens expanded his horizons and boosted his fanbase by venturing overseas – but global fame came with a cost

From the fog-bound coastal marshes of Kent in *Great Expectations* and the frost-bitten streets of London in *A Christmas Carol* to the austere brutality of the workhouse in *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens left us some of the most enduring portraits of life in Victorian Britain. The vast majority of his best-known characters were born and bred in Britain and lived their lives in backdrops and cityscapes that were unmistakably British.

Yet, for all that, Dickens was not a man whose horizons ended at Britain's borders. Here was an author who spent a great deal of his adult life engaged in foreign travel. And these travels would not only give Dickens a fresh, international perspective on his homeland, but also inform his novels.

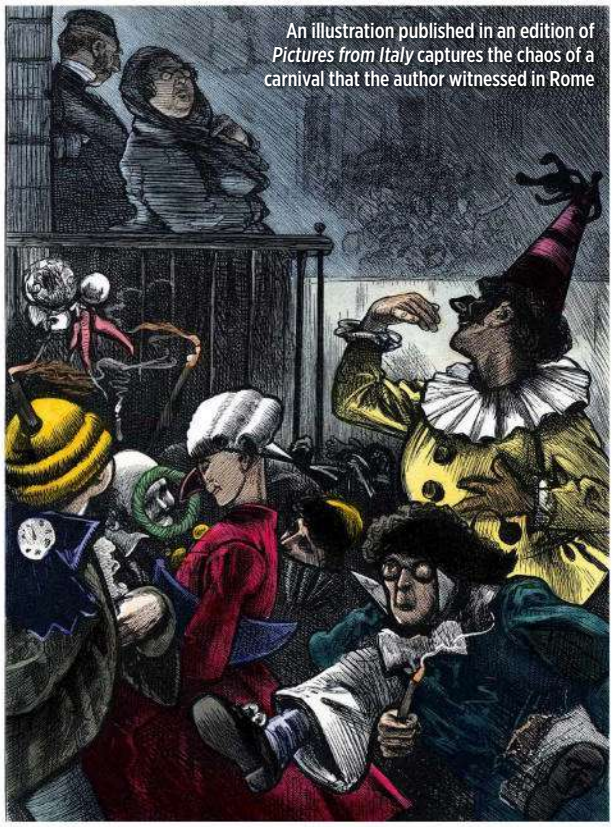
Dickens lived in a period when, thanks to advances in industrialisation, travel was entering the orbit of more and more middle and upper class Victorians. "The world," he is reported as remarking "was so much smaller than we thought it; we were all so connected... without knowing it; people supposed to be far apart were so constantly elbowing each other."

And he was determined to explore this "smaller" world for himself. That wanderlust drew him, inevitably, to continental Europe. Dickens crossed the Channel multiple times in the 1840s and 50s, training his sharp eye for the vagaries of the human condition on the residents of France, Italy and Switzerland.

ON THE CONTINENT

Perhaps Dickens's best-known European escapade was a grand tour of Italy with his family in 1844. His Italian adventures took him to Milan, Rome, Florence, Pisa (where he went up the leaning tower) and Naples, from where he climbed Vesuvius. For the most part, he was entranced by what he saw. He fell in love with "pleasant Verona... with its beautiful old palaces" and was captivated by the vivacious street carnivals and the costumes that he encountered.

However, on a visit to the Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, he was less impressed by Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece *The Last Supper* – or, at least, the clumsy attempts to restore it. This, he reported in his 1846 travelogue *Pictures from Italy*, had evidently been performed by a band of "bunglers".

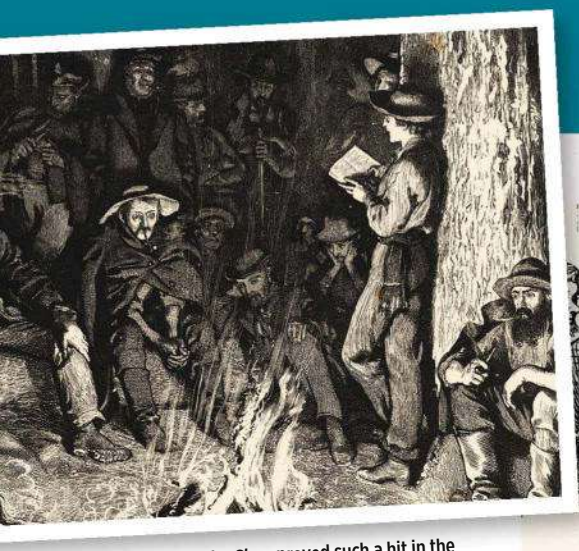


An illustration published in an edition of *Pictures from Italy* captures the chaos of a carnival that the author witnessed in Rome

Dickens, pictured left in c1850, fell in love with the "pleasant" city of Verona (*above*) when he visited the Italian peninsula with his young family

Few who've read 1859's *A Tale of Two Cities* will be surprised to learn that Dickens was something of a Francophile. He was a regular visitor to Paris, reporting what "an immense impression" that city had upon him. "It is the most extraordinary place in the world... My eyes ached, and my head grew giddy, as novelty, novelty, novelty; nothing but strange and striking things came swarming before me."

Yet Dickens's admiration wasn't restricted to the French capital. He wrote parts of *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* during family holidays (with his wife, Catherine, and their children) in Boulogne-sur-Mer, a coastal city in the Pas-de-Calais that, despite being "piled and jumbled about", he very clearly loved.



The Old Curiosity Shop proved such a hit in the US that people would gather to hear each new instalment of the serial being read aloud

If Dickens's relationship with France and Italy was, for the most part, a warm one, his attitude to the United States can perhaps best be described as complicated. When he first crossed the Atlantic in 1842, he did so hoping to find a bold young democracy that had lessons to impart to the class-ridden society he'd left behind in Britain. Yet this American love affair would have its fair share of ups and downs.

LIFE ACROSS THE POND

When Dickens arrived in America, he did so as the most famous author in the world, and New York welcomed him accordingly. On Valentine's Day 1842, the city threw Dickens a party at its grandest venue, the Park Theater, where he was mobbed by 3,000 admirers. "If I should live to grow old," Dickens told a dinner the following night, "the scenes of this and other evenings will shine as brightly to my dull eyes 50 years hence as now." Yet soon, in a letter to the English actor William Macready, Dickens was lamenting that the US was not "the republic I came to see" nor "the republic of my imagination".

There were numerous reasons why the author's ardour cooled so rapidly. Though he was flattered by his New York reception, he soon came to find his celebrity in the United States oppressive, complaining that he couldn't "drink a glass of water, without having 100 people looking down my throat when I open my mouth to swallow".

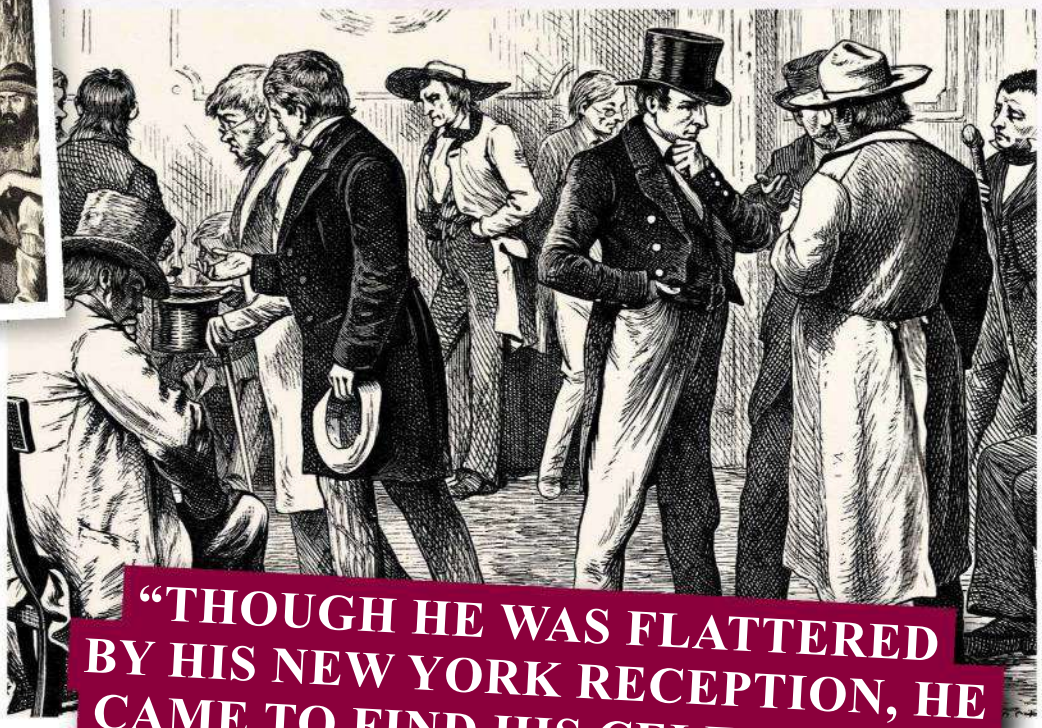
He also concluded rapidly that American democracy wasn't the shining beacon of egalitarianism that he had expected, writing in his travelogue *American Notes* that the US capital Washington was home to: "Despicable trickery at elections; under-handed tamperings with public officers; and cowardly attacks upon opponents, with scurrilous newspapers for shields, and hired pens for daggers."

Then, there was the question of money. In 1842, there were no international copyright laws, so Americans could read Dickens's works for free in pirated editions. To say that this state of affairs irritated Dickens would be an understatement. And it was an irritation he expressed through a vicious satire of American society in his next major novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

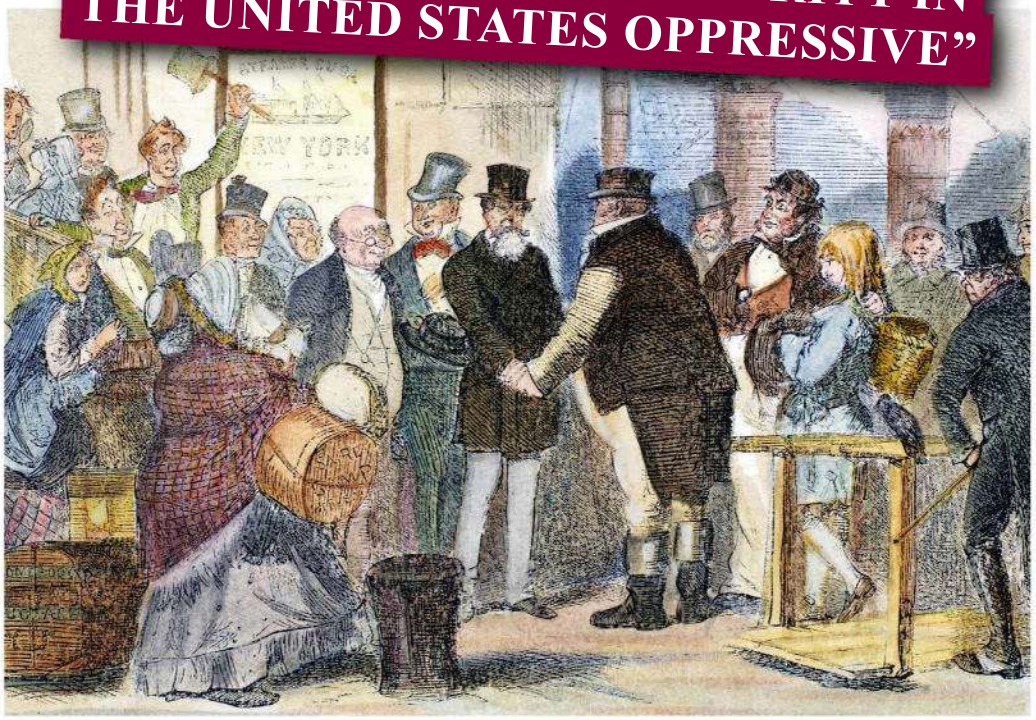
When an article in the *New York Courier and Enquirer* observed that "We are all described as a filthy, gormandising race," the relationship between Dickens and America appeared to be broken.

Yet it would be repaired. In 1867 and 1868, Dickens sailed to America again to give a series of readings that were received rapturously. He'd lashed out at America, and America had lashed out back. But even in a nation that had felt the sharp sting of Dickens's rebukes, there was no denying his genius. ⊙

WORDS: SPENCER MIZEN



"THOUGH HE WAS FLATTERED BY HIS NEW YORK RECEPTION, HE CAME TO FIND HIS CELEBRITY IN THE UNITED STATES OPPRESSIVE"



TOP: **An image from *American Notes*, depicting Dickens's 1842 visit to the White House. Overall, the author's experiences of US politics left him feeling deflated**

BOTTOM: **Dickens was met by jubilant crowds during his 1867–68 reading tour across the US**

GETTY IMAGES X5, ALAMY X2

MEET THE EXPERT

DR LEE JACKSON ON WHY CHARLES DICKENS REMAINS RELEVANT TODAY

DR LEE JACKSON is a writer and historian with an interest in the social history and geography of Victorian London. He is the author of numerous books, including *Dickensland: The Curious History of Dickens's London* (Yale, 2023), and is also the creator of the online Dictionary of Victorian London (*victorianlondon.org*). To hear Lee on the *HistoryExtra* podcast, scan the QR code shown above or visit *historyextra.com/dickens-london-pod*

Dickens's evocation of the fears, excitement and confusion of childhood is peerless

Why do so many people still find Charles Dickens fascinating, more than 150 years after his death? For a start, the echoes of his own life in his work continue to intrigue us. Mapping biography to fiction has its dangers – Dickens is never simply telling us his life story. Nonetheless, as one early 20th-century critic put it, "the secret of Dickens's sympathy with neglected childhood is to be found in the story of his own early days". Oliver Twist, Little Nell, Pip – a host of orphaned children – speak to something deep in his psyche, a feeling of abandonment and shame, associated with his childhood experience at Warren's Blacking Factory, and his father's imprisonment for debt. He is a writer about whom we know so much – a lively, sociable, dynamic self-made man, whose surviving letters run to 12 volumes. Nonetheless, new connections, new correspondence, new portraits, are still being uncovered. There will always be scope for another biography, another attempt to understand the genius of a boy who came from humble beginnings to scale the heights of Victorian society.

Of course, Dickens's personal reputation has taken some knocks. He was revered in the early 20th century as a 'great man' in every respect, a thoroughly moral author whose life and works were exemplary – not least his interest in the lives of the poor, and his concern for neglected children. But his affair with the young actress Ellen Ternan – first made public in the 1930s – and the consequent brutal separation from his wife Catherine – have entered the public consciousness and darkened his image. His works, too, have never been without their critics. He has been lambasted as sentimental – think of Oscar Wilde's famous barb, "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing". He has been praised for creating vivid characters, but also mocked for sketching impossible caricatures. Feminist critics have rightly noted the prevalence of docile child-like women and grotesques amongst his female characters.

So why does Dickens's work endure? Because we still love his stories. *A Christmas Carol* continues to be told and reworked every Christmas, a perfectly constructed ghost story with a universal moral. We tend to mock the Victorians for their earnestness, but this particular morality tale transcends the era in which it was written. Dickens's evocation of the fears, excitement and confusion of childhood is also peerless, from Oliver Twist to Pip Pirrip – and, again, these are tales which we constantly retell and refresh.

And yes, Dickens often deals in monsters and melodrama. But who can forget the iconic figure of Miss Havisham haunting her decaying mansion, plotting revenge on the male sex? Or the brutality of Bill Sikes? Finally, of course, there is his greatest character – London – where "life and death went hand in hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side" – reflecting the dark, mysterious labyrinth of Dickens's imagination.

GETTY IMAGES X2

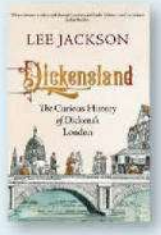
Colourised images of Dickens on display in London, 2020. The author still remains a source of much fascination today

GET HOOKED

Learn more about the life of Charles Dickens with our pick of key resources

BOOKS

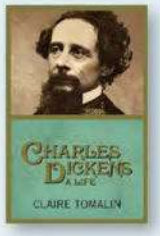
SELECTED BY DR LEE JACKSON



Dickensland: The Curious History of Dickens's London

By Dr Lee Jackson (Yale University Press, 2023)

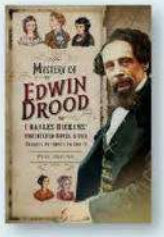
Dr Lee Jackson traces the fascinating history of Dickensian tourism, exploring both real Victorian London and a fictional city shaped by fandom, tourism and heritage entrepreneurs – 150 years of 'Dickensland'.



Charles Dickens: A Life

By Claire Tomalin (Viking, 2011)

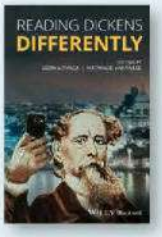
Claire Tomalin, famous for her masterful biographies of historical figures, here paints an unforgettable portrait of Dickens. From childhood to adulthood, she captures the complex and divided character that existed beneath his literary brilliance.



The Mystery of Edwin Drood: Charles Dickens' Unfinished Novel and Our Endless Attempts to End It

By Dr Pete Orford (Pen & Sword, 2018)

Orford's book reveals how readers, fans and sleuths have tried to conclude Dickens's unfinished final novel – including staging a real-life trial.

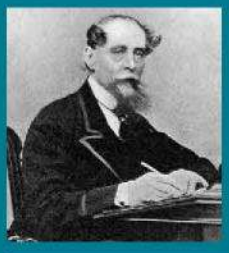


Reading Dickens Differently

Edited by Dr Leon Litvack and Prof Nathalie Vanfasse (Wiley-Blackwell, 2020)

This collection of essays covers a diverse array of Dickensian topics: from the machinations that saw the author buried in Westminster Abbey against his wishes, to his appearance in modern video games.

ON THE BBC

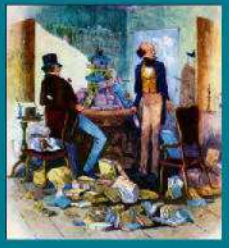


BBC RADIO 4

◀ The Essay: The Writer's Dickens

bbc.co.uk/sounds/series/b018mf2y

Contemporary novelists reflect on how the 19th-century author is both a role model and a shadow looming over their own writing.

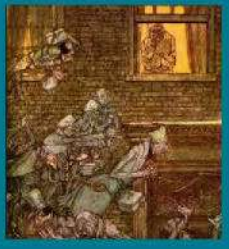


BBC RADIO 4

◀ Charles Dickens adaptations

bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/b03trsph

Discover BBC Radio 4's archive of Charles Dickens adaptations, including readings of *Sketches by Boz* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*.



BBC RADIO 4

◀ In Our Time: A Christmas Carol

bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0012fl5

Melvyn Bragg and a trio of experts discuss the story of Scrooge's salvation by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come.

ONLINE AND AUDIO

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Dr Alexander Wakelam examines the fates of the people who ended up in debtors' prisons – including Dickens's father, John. Read at *historyextra.com/debtors-prisons*

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Author Pen Vogler explores 19th-century food through the life and works of the era's best-known writer. Listen at *historyextra.com/dickens-food*

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(streaming on BBC iPlayer)

First broadcast in 2015, this 20-part drama brings some of Dickens's most memorable characters together in a single story: from Jacob Marley to the Artful Dodger.

BBC ONE

Great Expectations

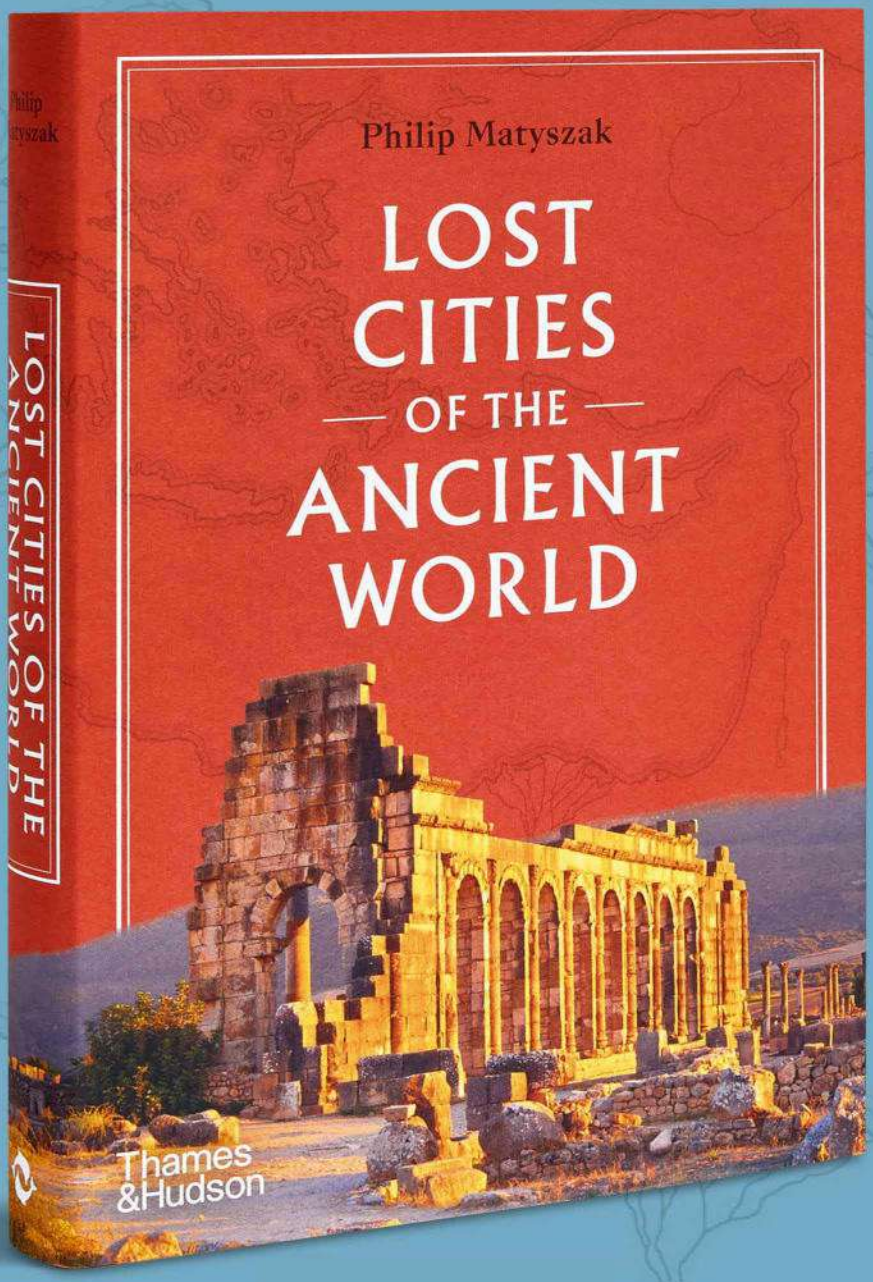
(streaming on BBC iPlayer)

A twist of fate shows Pip a dark world of possibilities, but is he willing to pay the price? Find out in Steven Knight's fresh take on the Dickens classic, starring Olivia Colman.

GETTY IMAGES X3, BBC X2

Derinkuyu, Ropotamo, Zoar...

Discover the cities that were abandoned, submerged or swallowed up by the sands of time



OUT NOW

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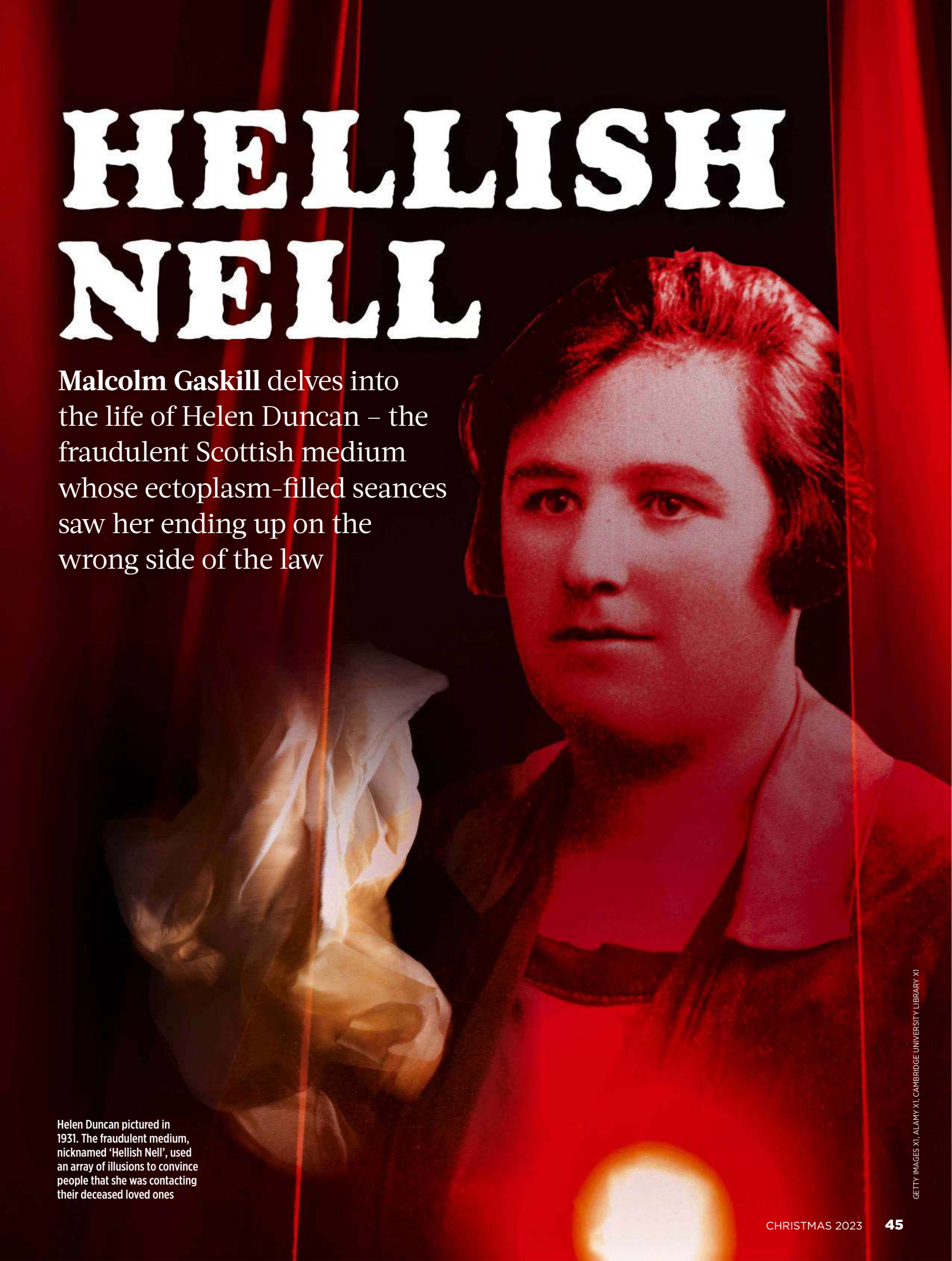
HELLISH NELL

Malcolm Gaskill delves into the life of Helen Duncan – the fraudulent Scottish medium whose ectoplasm-filled seances saw her ending up on the wrong side of the law



Helen Duncan pictured in 1931. The fraudulent medium, nicknamed 'Hellish Nell', used an array of illusions to convince people that she was contacting their deceased loved ones

GETTY IMAGES X1, ALAMY X1, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY X1

ABOVE: **Psychical researcher Harry Price, who unmasked Duncan as a fraud, models the equipment he used when monitoring the movements of mediums during seances**

LEFT: **A colourised photograph of Duncan c1940, around the time she began offering her services to the families of Britain's WWII dead**

ALAMY X4, MARY EVANS X1

It's the winter of 1942 and you have lost a son in the war. Devastated and desperate for a final farewell, you attend a seance where you sit facing open curtains strung across a corner of the room. A stout black-haired woman enters in stately fashion and takes her seat there. The main lights are switched off, leaving only the glow of a red bulb. A gramophone plays light-hearted music, which, the organiser explains, helps "raise the vibrations".

As the curtains close, a man you can't see introduces himself as Albert, the medium's spirit guide. With him, he says, he has the spirit of a soldier killed in the war. When Albert says his name, you call to claim him, and the curtains part to reveal, dimly, a glimmering mass trailing from the medium's slumped body. The audience gasps – but to you this is more than a paranormal spectacle. For as the shape increases in size and definition, you see your dead son. "Hello Mum", he says, holding out a spectral hand.

The medium here was Mrs Helen Duncan, a virtuoso 'materialiser' and producer of 'ectoplasm', who, in the 1930s and 40s travelled around Britain, usually with a female companion. Typically, her destinations were cities or small towns, often seaside resorts. Her health was poor, and she gave off an air of self-sacrifice for a higher cause. She performed in sitting rooms and attics, chapels and public halls, to people from all walks of life. Some were passionate believers or the desperate bereaved; others went for fun – "going to the spooks", they called it.

Opinion was divided. Did her psychic powers extend a bridge of love and enlightenment into the afterlife? Or was this mysterious woman just a heartless fraud who exploited vulnerable people?

MATERIALISING SPIRITS

Helen Duncan was born Victoria MacFarlane (Helen was her middle name) in Perthshire in 1897, the fourth child in a working-class family. She was a difficult child who claimed to have the sometimes disturbing gift of second sight, earning herself the nickname 'Hellish Nell'. After leaving school, she worked in various menial occupations and in 1914 became pregnant. In 1916 she married Henry Duncan, a soldier invalided from the trenches, who adopted her illegitimate daughter and with whom she had several other children. Henry was a Spiritualist (part of a movement based on the belief that departed souls can interact with the living) who nurtured his wife's psychic powers until, it is said, she was able to generate ectoplasm – a substance alleged to be a manifestation of spiritual energy. By the end of the 1920s, when so many families mourned the dead and missing of World War I, she was materialising spirits. And so, her fame spread.

In 1930 the London Spiritualist Alliance engaged her for a series of seances, and the following year she was tested by a psychical researcher named Harry Price, who suspected that she swallowed and regurgitated butter muslin to impersonate spirits. Price shared this insight with a contact in Edinburgh, who in 1933 lured Mrs Duncan to a seance where her phenomena were exposed as crude puppetry. This included the manipulation of a tatty undervest to create 'Peggy', a child spirit guide. Helen Duncan was reported to the police, tried for fraud, and fined £10.

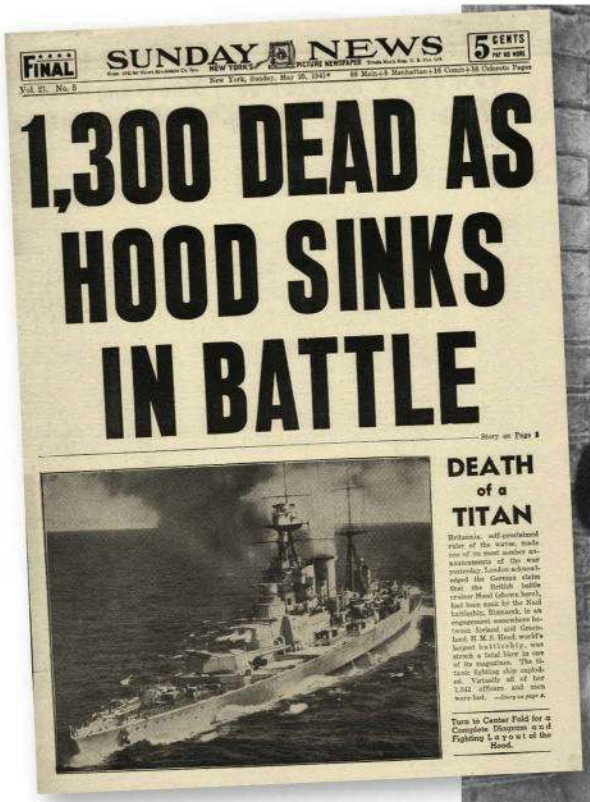
Price, her nemesis, thought the game was up – but among Spiritualists the medium's reputation soared. At worst, she was ▶

Duncan pictured with a trail of 'ectoplasm' exiting her mouth. The substance was usually made from butter muslin, with photographs of faces sometimes attached

A photograph from a 1928 seance shows a 'spirit' supposedly floating above the fray

The face of Duncan's child spirit guide, 'Peggy', was likely that of an old rubber doll

"Duncan's phenomena were exposed as crude puppetry, including the manipulation of a tatty undervest to create 'Peggy', a child spirit guide"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1,300 DEAD AS HOOD SINKS IN BATTLE

DEATH of a TITAN

a genuine psychic resorting to irregular methods to satisfy public demand; at best she was a martyr to Spiritualism, whose practitioners had for decades been persecuted under the Vagrancy Act of 1824 and, occasionally, even the Witchcraft Act of 1735, which outlawed the pretence to conjure spirits.

WARTIME CONTROVERSY

Helen Duncan continued to hold seances far and wide, and briefly had a features page in a Dundee Saturday newspaper. The money she and her husband Henry earned – he acted as her manager – pulled them out of poverty. But the sword of the law always hung over them, as it did over all Spiritualist mediums.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, Mrs Duncan's services were required as never before, not only to assuage grief but to prove or disprove rumours, allay fears (or sometimes confirm them), and provide war news and public information held back by an anxious government. Some people just wanted to know when to expect air raids. This, then, was Helen's finest hour; but it would also be her downfall. In 1941 she came to the attention of the Secret Service when she appeared to know about the sinking of the British warships HMS *Hood* and HMS *Barham* before announcements were made. A sailor from the *Barham* was said to have manifested in Portsmouth, where his distraught family lived.

Helen Duncan's card was marked. In January 1944, when preparations for D-Day were underway, she fell prey to another sting, in Portsmouth, when police broke up a seance at the 'Master's Temple Psychic Centre', and she and three accomplices were arrested. What might have been a matter for the local magistrates' court quickly turned into something more serious when the Spiritualists' National Union appointed a King's Counsel barrister, a Spiritualist, to defend her, and the Crown followed suit with a KC who was also an MI5 officer. The case was relocated to the Old Bailey in London, and Helen Duncan charged under the Witchcraft Act.

"The case was relocated to the Old Bailey in London, and Helen Duncan charged under the Witchcraft Act"

ATTACK

ANTONESCU IS CALLED TO HITLER'S H.Q.

OLD BAILEY CASE UNDER WITCHCRAFT ACT, 1735

Seances held at Portsmouth resulted in charges under the Witchcraft Act of 1735 being heard at the Old Bailey to-day.

Marshal Antonescu of Rumania, with his brother Mihail, has gone to Hitler's headquarters

Although the judge insisted this was simply a fraud trial, the Spiritualists protested that Spiritualism itself was on trial, and pressmen eagerly splashed the 'witch-trial' across their front pages. The defence's strategy was to call a succession of witnesses testifying to the reality of Mrs Duncan's powers – and yet by the terms of the Witchcraft Act, this proved only that she was guilty of pretending to conjure spirits, a crime which carried a custodial sentence. Helen Duncan was sent to Holloway Prison in north London for nine months, of which she served six.

After the war, Helen Duncan returned to the circuit, but it seems she was

TOP LEFT: **Rumours that Duncan had predicted the 1941 sinking of HMS *Hood* caught the attention of the Secret Service**

TOP RIGHT: **Duncan's agent and accomplice, Frances Brown, shields her face during the 1944 Old Bailey trial**

ABOVE RIGHT: **The case attracted plenty of column inches**

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X2, MARY EVANS X1, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY X1

Duncan's conviction under the Witchcraft Act resulted in her being sent to Holloway Prison, pictured here in the early 1900s

drinking and her ectoplasmic displays were less spectacular than during the glory days. She was arrested a third time, in 1956 at a seance in Nottingham, but now she couldn't be prosecuted under the Witchcraft Act because it had been repealed five years earlier, partly due to outcry at her conviction from Spiritualists and non-Spiritualist libertarians alike. (Even Churchill had been incredulous, not because he was a Spiritualist, as some Spiritualists have claimed, but because the prosecution was a waste of resources.) The Nottingham raid did, however, mark a precipitous decline in Mrs Duncan's health, and she died in December that year, at home in Edinburgh.

A TROUBLING LEGACY

At this distance of time, it's hard to imagine the audacity and credulity required to sustain the staging of materialisation seances in public life for so long. It's remarkable how obvious fraud could hover around a balance of probabilities and that Mrs Duncan's work could be the subject of controversy, where obvious truths led to feverish debates about evidence and interpretation.

There is, however, serious, compelling significance to Duncan's story. This is not only that antiquated law was modernised following her conviction, freeing sincere believers to worship without fear of molestation, but that the testimonies left by people who attended Mrs Duncan's seances open a historical window on the intensity of grief, public and private, in a nation traumatised by war.

MALCOLM GASKILL is emeritus professor of history at the University of East Anglia. He is the author of numerous books on the history of witchcraft, including *Hellish Nell: The Curious Case of Britain's Last Witch Trial* (Penguin, 2023)

GET HOOKED

LISTEN

Malcolm Gaskill discusses the life of Helen Duncan on an episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast. Stream it in full at *historyextra.com/hellish-nell-pod*

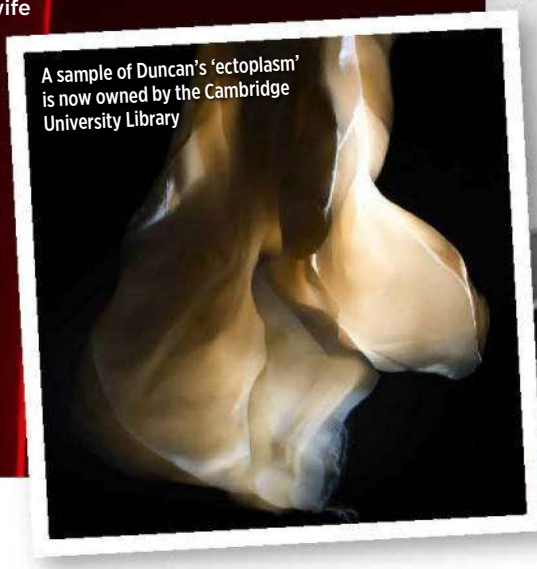
SCIENCE V SPIRITUALISM

Harry Price's quest for truth saw him subjecting Helen Duncan to an array of experiments

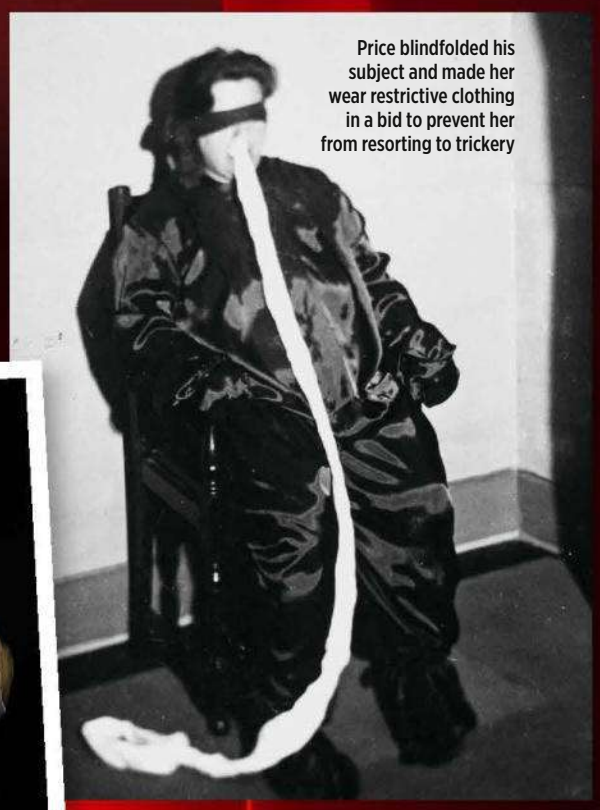
In 1931 Harry Price was Britain's foremost ghosthunter and psychical researcher. Attracted by the bold claims of materialisation mediums, he paid Helen Duncan handsomely to make herself available for study at his National Laboratory of Psychical Research in London. This establishment, likened by some to a cross between an operating theatre and a torture chamber, was staffed by Price alone, although he did enlist the services of a midwife friend to inspect Mrs Duncan's body, as well as various other medical and academic witnesses.

After the first seance, on 4 May, Price took flash photographs of ectoplasm in which faces appeared. Price admitted to being impressed – but only by the Duncans' effrontery and the Spiritualists' credulity. Other seances followed that month, one of which ended in farce when the medium's nose began bleeding. Price then forcibly X-rayed her, and she fled into the street, screaming hysterically. During the final session, Price subjected her to a demeaning medical examination, and managed to obtain a sample of ectoplasm, which proved to be an artfully folded tube of paper.

From these investigations he concluded that Helen Duncan was a fraud, whose 'ectoplasm', both muslin and paper, was regurgitated to deceive seance audiences.



A sample of Duncan's 'ectoplasm' is now owned by the Cambridge University Library



Price blindfolded his subject and made her wear restrictive clothing in a bid to prevent her from resorting to trickery

WHAT GREAT PAINTINGS SAY

We explore the story behind an allegorical painting that celebrates the triumph of love over hate, peace over war

Venus, Mars and Cupid

by Peter Paul Rubens, c1635

In the mid-1630s, when this painting is believed to have been created, the Eighty Years' War [a conflict for independence fought between the 17 provinces of the Netherlands and Spain, the empire that ruled them] was close to entering its final decade. Deeply embroiled in the politics of the conflict was Flemish artist, diplomat and statesman Peter Paul Rubens, who was instrumental in negotiating peace between England and Spain. A passionate advocate for peace, it's perhaps unsurprising that Rubens's diplomatic struggles often spilled over into his artwork.

"As well as a talented artist, Rubens was also an incredibly well-educated man who could speak six languages and who travelled to many European courts, including England and Spain," says Dr Amy Orrock, co-curator of the current Rubens & Women exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery. "This painting, which depicts the Roman goddess of love, Venus, with her lover, Mars, god of war, and their child, Cupid, was painted towards the end of his career and demonstrates many of the qualities for which Rubens is so famous, including his portrayals of women."

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

"Rubens's view of women as strong forces for peace was a belief that aligned closely with his own wishes and goals as a Spanish diplomat," continues Orrock. "He was no stranger to powerful women, either. For much of his career he was in the service of Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, the daughter of Philip II of Spain who governed over the Spanish Netherlands and strove for peace in that country. This motif of women as peace-bringers appears again and again in Rubens's paintings, including *Venus, Mars and Cupid*."

The message of the painting is often interpreted as a celebration of peace, according to Orrock. Here, Venus is shown feeding her child, Cupid, with droplets of milk that spurt from her breast, while an armoured Mars appears to be turning away from the domestic scene, as if to return to war. Yet look closely and, in the shadows, small *putti* (winged infants) are undoing his armour. Indeed, his shield and helmet have already been removed, lying discarded at the couple's feet. Mars, watching his lover and child with tenderness in his gaze, has quite literally been disarmed by the domestic scene before him; war has been defeated by love.

"Rubens was obsessed with classical mythology," says Orrock, "and was greatly influenced by the works of classical writers like Ovid and Virgil, as well as the mythological works of 16th-century artists like Titian.

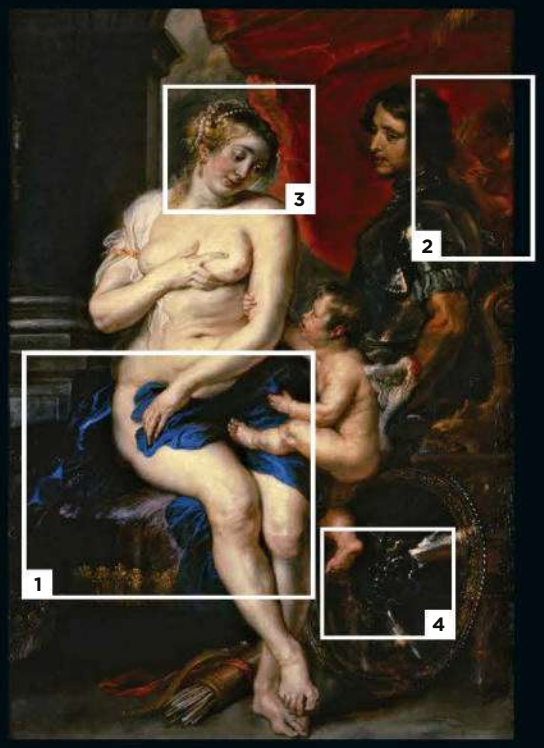
"He travelled to Italy between 1600 and 1608 and there encountered many classical sculptures, filling his sketchbook with drawings and using them as inspiration for his own works. In his own Venus, he has reimagined the pose of the famous Medici Venus [now housed in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence] but has given her the voluptuous 'Rubenesque' figure he is so often remembered for. But although he gained inspiration from the classical statues he saw, he was keen to avoid what he referred to as "the smell of stone" in his drawings and paintings, seeking to convey the flesh and blood of the figures he created."

The peace that Rubens so longed for would not be achieved until 1648, eight years after the artist's death, but his works live on as testament to the triumph of love over hate.

WORDS: CHARLOTTE HODGMAN

GET HOOKED

Venus, Mars and Cupid is on permanent show at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, and also features in the gallery's current exhibition, Rubens & Women, which is open until 28 January 2024. Visit the gallery's website for more information and to book tickets: *dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk*



1. DRAPERY
The blue drapery that covers Venus would have looked brighter in Rubens's time, says Orrock. It was created with a pigment called smalt, which has degraded and which now, in the shadows, looks darker. The highlights were painted in a natural ultramarine made from lapis lazuli.

2. PUTTI
Behind Mars, *putti* can be seen undoing his armour, as the god of war tenderly watches his son and lover.

3. FACIAL FEATURES
The face of Venus is widely believed to have been modelled on that of Helena Fourment, Rubens's second wife whom he married in 1630.

4. SHIELD
On the front of Mars's discarded shield is the grotesque face of Medusa, a symbol of evil that was often used to repel other dangerous threats.

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Wolf Hall AND Bring up the Bodies

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GRANDFATHER FROST, 1962

▼ Children gather before a sculpture of Ded Moroz ('Grandfather Frost') in the Moscow Kremlin's Taynitsky Garden. In Russia, Ded Moroz delivers gifts to children overnight on New Year's Eve, rather than Christmas Eve.

GIFTS, TREES & FEASTING

We take a journey through the photo archives to reveal how Christmas and its many traditions have been celebrated over the years – and around the world

GETTY IMAGES X3

YULE FUEL, 1941

▼ A group of Santa Clauses eat a well-earned lunch in Chicago. Part of the Volunteers of America's fundraising effort for low-income people, the Sidewalk Santa scheme was launched in 1900, with volunteers famously standing alongside model chimneys while seeking donations.

FESTIVE GRIT, 1936

▲ The aftershocks of the Great Depression affected families throughout the United States for much of the 1930s. Rather than a festive feast of turkey and treats, these children, near Smithfield, Iowa, are eating a dinner of potatoes, cabbage and pie.

YULETIDE SPRUCE, c1895

◀ First introduced to Britain by Queen Charlotte, the German wife of George III, Victoria's husband Prince Albert further popularised the tradition of decorating a tree at Christmas. This doughty reveller returning home with her tree shows how ubiquitous the custom had become by the late Victorian era.

GETTY IMAGES X7, ALAMY X1

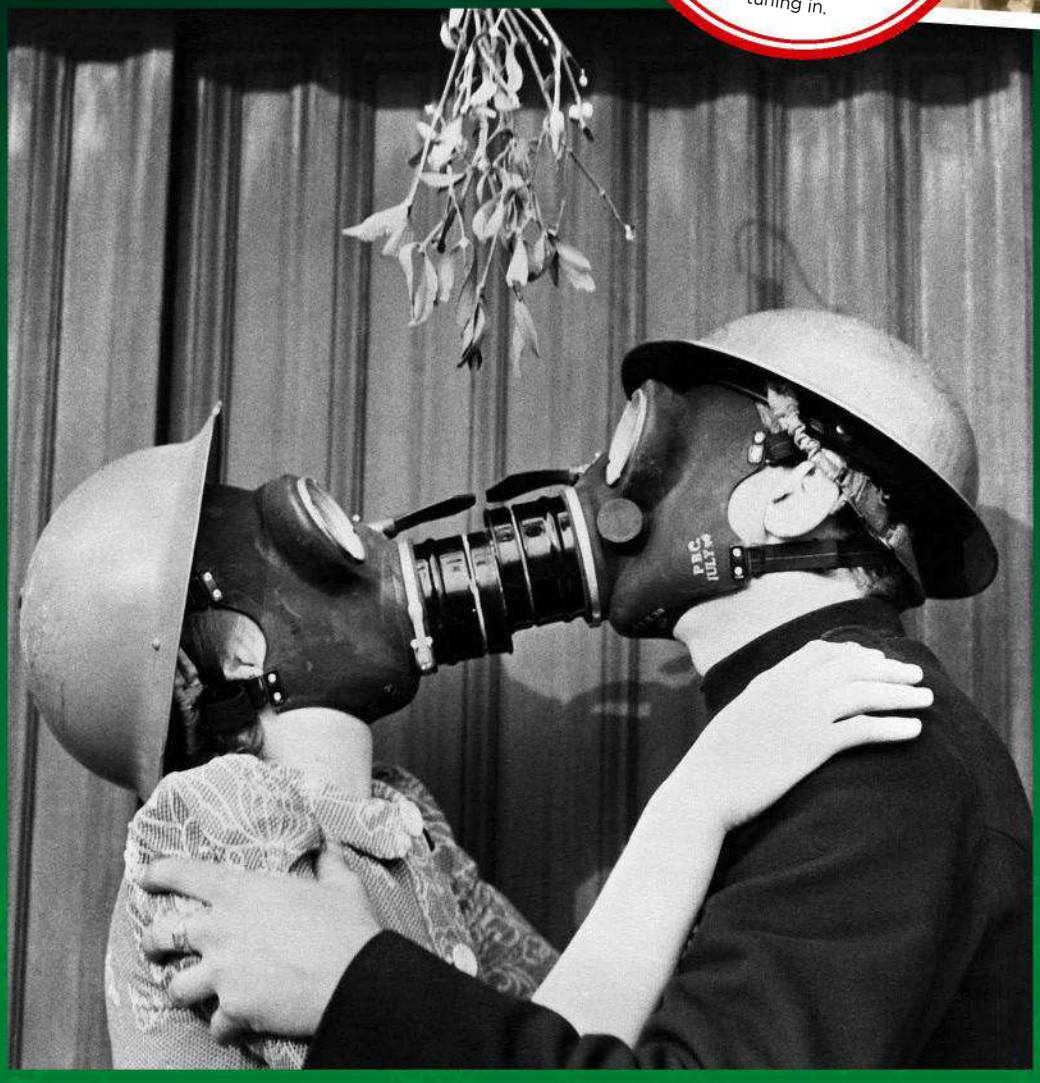
SEASON OF THE SOLE, 1931

▲ Christmas has always brought out the generosity of spirit in people. In this bizarre scene, two bootmakers pose with a giant shoe bound for the children's ward at the London Hospital in Whitechapel, where it was later filled with toys.

DID YOU KNOW?

LUNAR CHRISTMAS

During Christmas 1968, Apollo 8 astronauts Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and Bill Anders became the first humans to mark the holiday outside the Earth's atmosphere. While orbiting the Moon, they recited *Genesis* to an audience of millions tuning in.



O LITTLE TOWN..., 1898

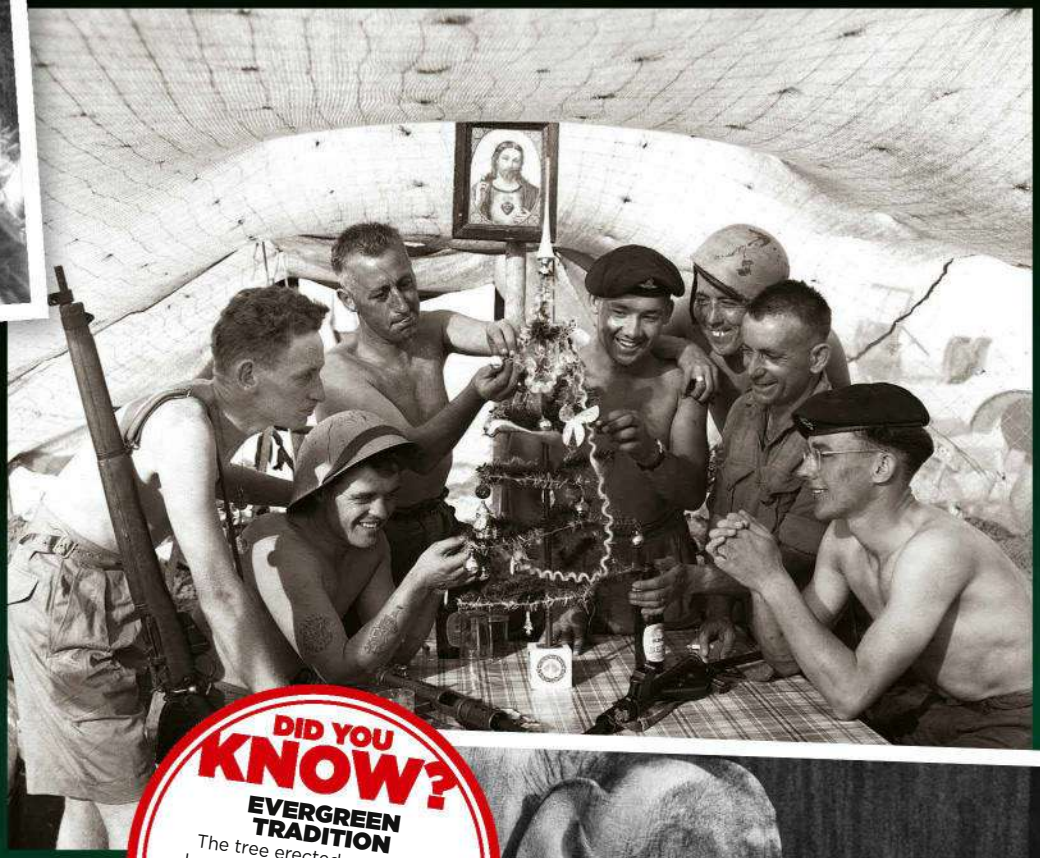
▲ As the famous Christmas carol goes: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." This image from the late 19th century shows a congregation of Christians gathering to worship in the carol's setting, the town of Bethlehem. According to the Gospels, this is where the very first Christmas took place with the birth of Jesus Christ more than 2,000 years ago.

KISSMAS, 1940

◀ Not even the Blitz could dampen the romance of Christmas. During World War II, the fear of poison gas being dropped on civilian centres in Britain led to the circulation of gas masks among the population. Ironically, mistletoe – under which these two mask-wearing merrymakers are kissing – is toxic if consumed.

NATIVE NOËL, c1910

▲ During the early 20th century, many Native Americans, such as this group of Flathead people in Montana, embraced the Christmas festival and its trappings.



FAR FROM HOME, 1956

▶ Stationed near Port Said, Egypt, in the wake of the Suez Crisis, seven British soldiers take time to festoon their makeshift Christmas tree with decorations.

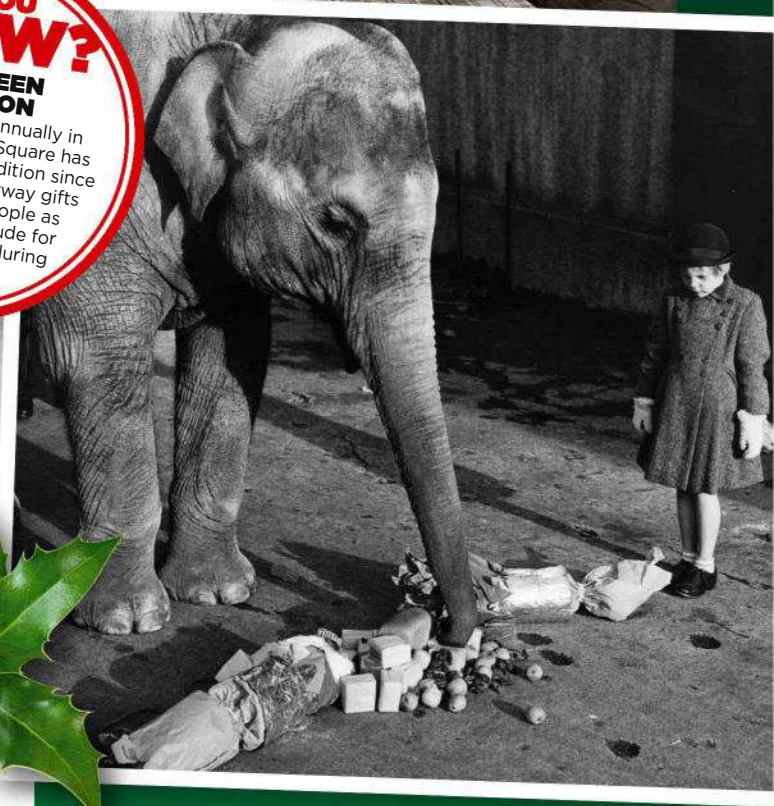
DID YOU KNOW?

EVERGREEN TRADITION

The tree erected annually in London's Trafalgar Square has been a cherished tradition since 1947. Each year, Norway gifts it to the British people as a symbol of gratitude for Britain's support during World War II.

FESTIVE CANDY, c1919

◀ Piñatas are synonymous with celebrations in Mexico and Christmas is no exception, as demonstrated here. Traditionally bashed open on Christmas Eve, some believe the piñata represents the Devil, with its disgorged bounty symbolising God's reward to the faithful.



PRESENTS FOR A PACHYDERM, 1954

▲ Even animals like to enjoy a bit of festive cheer, if this photograph is anything to go by. From his home at London Zoo, Dumbo the elephant interrogates the contents of a special Christmas cracker, while a young companion looks on at the spectacle in awe.

GETTY IMAGES X9, ALAMY X1

CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS, 1934

▼ The tradition of stuffing hosiery with gifts at Christmas is as old as the festival itself and supposedly originated with Saint Nicholas, the template for Father Christmas. As seen here, the task of filling stockings is often a team effort!

CAROLS BEHIND BARS, 1950

▶ The young inmates of a correctional facility in Herford, West Germany, gather to listen to a local brass band as it serenades them with a medley of Christmas music.

POLAR OPPOSITE, 1908

▲ Ernest Shackleton and his team pose for a photograph on Christmas Day from a place about as far from the home of Father Christmas as it's possible to be: Antarctica.

CHRISTMAS CHARITY, c1903

◀ Founded in 1865, the Salvation Army has become associated with Christmastime throughout the world. The organisation works to alleviate the plight of the poor and needy at what can be a difficult time of year for so many.

WORDS: DANNY BIRD

GET HOOKED

LISTEN

Historian George Goodwin answers questions about the origins of Christmas traditions on an episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast. Stream it now at *historyextra.com/christmas-everything-pod*

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21
The number of years between the first unofficial women's football world cup – held in Italy in 1970 – and FIFA's inaugural women's world cup, in China in 1991.

TOP OF THE WORLD
More than 6,000 people have reached the summit of Mount Everest since Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's 1953 ascent

ALAMY X2

ARE WE THERE YET?
Hillary (*left*) and Norgay pictured during their historic climb – which included a fair few toilet breaks

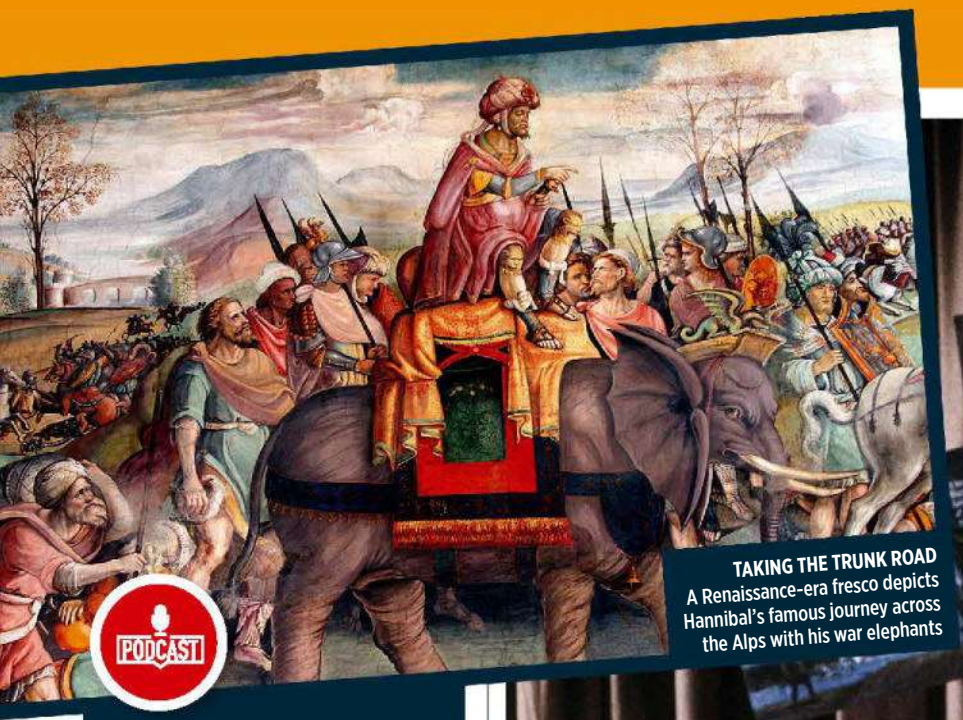
Did Edmund Hillary really pee on top of Everest?

SHORT ANSWER **As one of the first two people to step on the summit, he was hardly going to find facilities there, was he?**

LONG ANSWER For around 15 minutes on 29 May 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay stood on top of the world, the first climbers to conquer Mount Everest. While only a brief stop, they had long enough to take in the views, bury mementoes, and for Hillary to, erm, 'leave his mark'. Later, he revealed: "Having just paid our respects to the highest mountain in the world, I then had no choice but to urinate on it."

This wasn't some macho display of marking his territory. The New Zealander was just really desperate to go. During previous expeditions in preparation for an ascent of Everest, the British physiologist Griffith Pugh carried out research into the effects of extreme cold and altitudes on the human body, and concluded that a mountaineer had to drink much more water than initially thought in order to cope. To get their four-plus litres a day, the 1953 team carried special stoves adapted by Pugh so that they could melt all the ice they needed.

This, as Hillary discovered during his moment of celebration at the summit, filled their bladders rather quickly. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he decided to omit his mountain-top pee break from his first accounts of the historic climb.



PODCAST

TAKING THE TRUNK ROAD
A Renaissance-era fresco depicts Hannibal's famous journey across the Alps with his war elephants

What were the Punic Wars?

Answered by **Professor Philip Freeman**, author of *Hannibal: Rome's Greatest Enemy* (Pegasus Books, 2022)

The Punic Wars were a trio of conflicts between ancient Rome and the North African city of Carthage (in modern Tunisia).

The first war, fought between c260–c240 BC, revolved around a contest for control over Sicily, and culminated in Carthaginian defeat. The Carthaginians instead expanded into Spain, a land rich in resources.

In 218 BC the Romans and Carthaginians clashed again, with the latter led by the formidable Hannibal. He marched his army, as well as his war elephants, over the Alps to wage war on Roman soil. His campaign wreaked havoc for 15 years, but Rome was victorious.

A half-century of peace followed until Rome decided to obliterate the remnants of Carthage in 149 BC. The city was besieged and the Carthaginians eventually capitulated, paving the way for Rome's dominance of the Mediterranean for years to come.

As for the name of the wars, 'Punic' was the Roman name for the Carthaginians, whose Phoenician ancestors had migrated from Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) to North Africa.

▶ To hear more from Professor Philip Freeman on Rome v Carthage, visit *historyextra.com/rome-carthage-pod*

GETTY IMAGES X2, ALAMY X1

Who exactly was Walt Disney?

PODCAST

Answered by **John Wills**, professor of American media and culture at the University of Kent

Walt Disney (1901–66) remains a captivating, yet elusive, cultural figure. Indeed, the long-standing urban myth that his body (or perhaps only his head) was cryogenically frozen after his death, pending revival in the future, epitomises the bizarre tales that continue to surround the man.

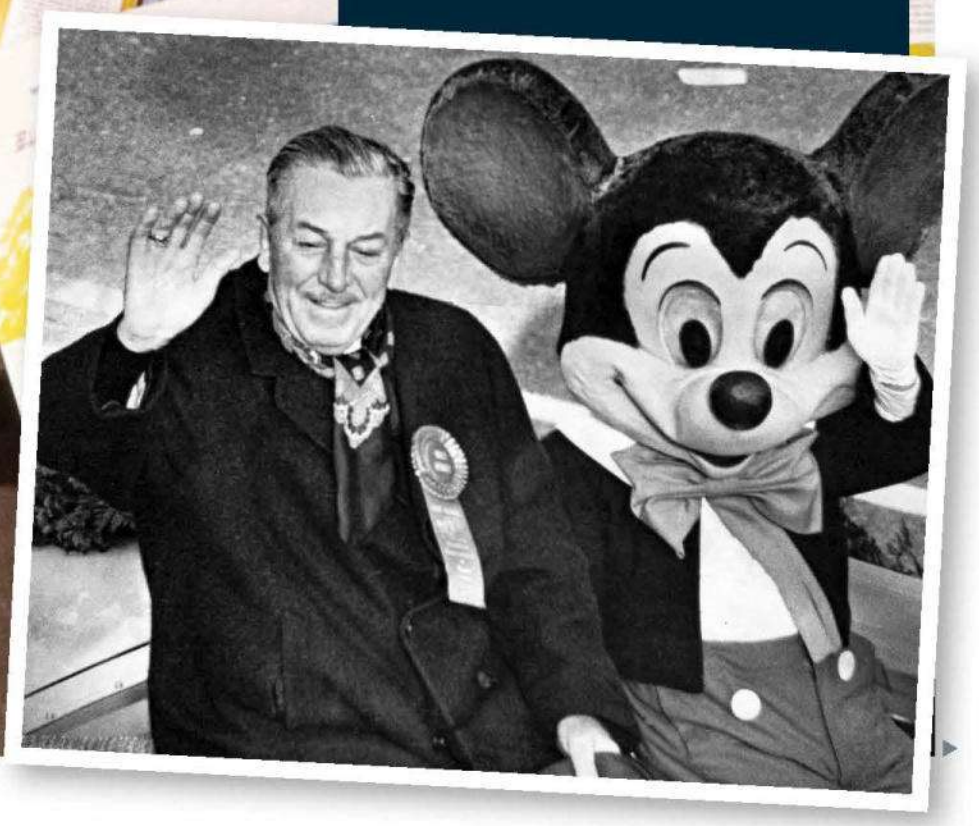
In addition to producing classic films, Disney was a constant presence on US television throughout the 1950s, becoming something of a father figure to the nation. He was mythologised as a good, caring person, and a genius who was looking out for everyone. However, Disney also had problematic relations with his staff, vehemently opposing unionisation and even naming in anti-communist hearings of the McCarthy era employees who had previously dared to strike. Though he has also been accused of antisemitism, this is a contentious topic – not least because of his record of donations to Jewish charities.

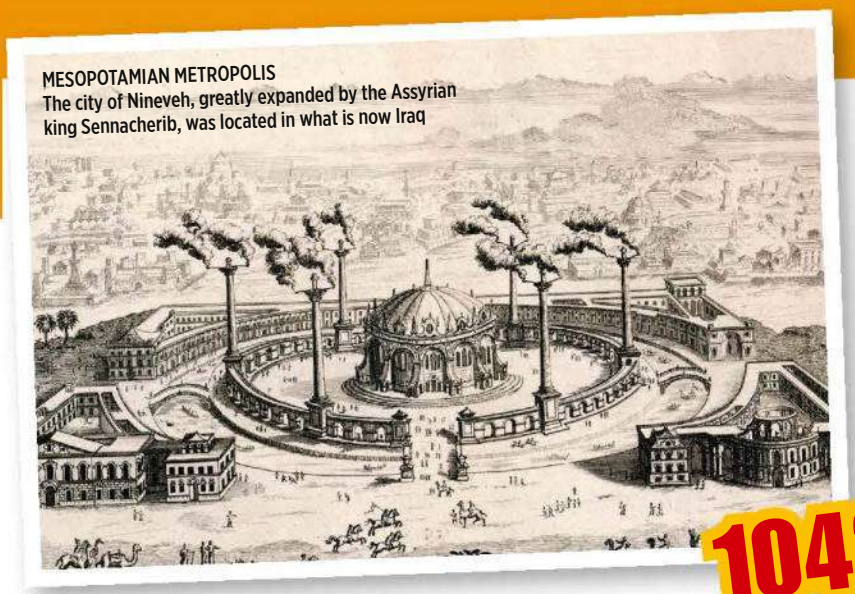
Ultimately, there is a lot of conflicting information surrounding the man, which is amplified by the fact that access to the Disney archives is near impossible. Nevertheless, his strong work ethic, perfectionism and penchant for control is undeniable. It seems likely that he will long remain a figure of fascination and debate.

▶ To hear more from Professor John Wills on the life and works of Walt Disney, visit *historyextra.com/walt-disney-pod*

LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU
Walt Disney poses with posters of some of his most famous films, 1955. The life of the animation mogul has been much mythologised in the 57 years since his death

MAN AND MOUSE
Disney waves to onlookers at the 1966 Rose Parade in Pasadena, California, accompanied by an actor playing his most famous creation: Mickey Mouse





MESOPOTAMIAN METROPOLIS
The city of Nineveh, greatly expanded by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, was located in what is now Iraq

When was the first parking restriction?

SHORT ANSWER It wouldn't have been wise to have got caught parking illegally in ancient Assyria: the punishment was a lot more than a fine

LONG ANSWER Early on in his reign, from 705–681 BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib – who may be known more for his appearances in the Old Testament – set about modernising and extending Nineveh to be his magnificent capital. In a colossal and ambitious project, he built palaces, temples and royal gardens, along with inner and outer city walls.

Another change he made was the introduction of a parking restriction on the main road in and out of Nineveh, possibly the first of its kind in the world. According to the 1954 book *Modern Traffic Control* by Joseph Ingraham, a tablet of Akkadian cuneiform has been discovered, reading, "Royal road, let no man decrease it." Those who left a chariot, cart or tethered animal on this sacred highway faced a sentence of death, supposedly by being impaled on a stake that would then be placed outside the perpetrator's home.

1043
The year that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* first referred to the date 25 December as "Christmas" rather than "midwinter" or "midwinter's mass".

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X4

PODCAST

Is there any historical basis to Norse mythology?

Answered by **Dr Eleanor Barraclough**, author of *Beyond the Northlands: Viking Voyages and the Old Norse Sagas* (OUP, 2016)

The cataclysmic tale of Ragnarok, an epic battle heralding the end of the world, may have its roots in the events of the sixth century AD. During this time, a massive dust veil shrouded significant parts of the globe, as chronicled by the Roman official Cassiodorus. His descriptions of a "blue-collared sun", a summer without warmth, unnatural droughts and diminished starlight conjure the apocalyptic imagery of Ragnarok.

The dust veil likely resulted from massive volcanic eruptions, evidence of which has been found in ice cores extracted in Greenland. The Norse myths were transcribed in neighbouring Iceland, a land characterised by volcanic activity, and the settlers arriving from places like Norway and the British Isles would have been awestruck by it. While the myths may not be history, they could have been inspired by actual events.

▶ To hear more from Dr Eleanor Barraclough on Norse mythology, visit *historyextra.com/norse-mythology-pod*

SCORCHED EARTH
Iceland's Fagradalsfjall volcano roars into life. Could cataclysmic events in Norse mythology have been inspired by similar eruptions?

POWER COUPLE
Winston and Clementine Churchill pose for the cameras on the statesman's 80th birthday, 30 November 1954

PODCAST

Who was Winston Churchill's closest advisor?

Answered by **Professor David Reynolds**, author of *Mirrors of Greatness: Churchill and the Leaders Who Shaped Him* (William Collins, 2023)

Clementine Churchill, who has long been overshadowed by her husband's towering historical reputation, played a pivotal role in the prime minister's life and political career. She wasn't merely a supportive spouse, but a trusted advisor, influencing his decisions in subtle, yet significant, ways.

Overall, Clementine's intelligence and independent spirit, shaped by her suffragette background, enriched their partnership. Despite Winston's occasionally brusque demeanour, he acknowledged feeling safer when she was by his side – even when his demanding nature and financial extravagances tested her resilience.

It was also a marriage that offered Clementine opportunities for fulfilment and agency. During World War I, she managed canteens for female munitions workers, adopting a Churchillian work ethic of her own. Then, during World War II, she spearheaded the Aid to Russia Fund and even visited the Soviet Union to witness the outcome of her efforts. Overall, this demonstrated her deep commitment to humanitarian causes and her dedication to addressing moral concerns.

▶ To hear more from Professor David Reynolds on the people who moulded Winston Churchill, visit *historyextra.com/churchill-pod*

A PRESSING MATTER
An illustration depicts English printing pioneer William Caxton showing off his latest specimens. Surprisingly, his first book (*right*) was actually printed in Bruges

What was the first book printed in English?

SHORT ANSWER A French romance about ancient Greek history turned out to be a shrewd marketing move

LONG ANSWER The first book printed in English was not an English story, it didn't have an English writer, and it wasn't printed in England. And no, it wasn't the Bible either, as could be expected. Instead, it was *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, a medieval French courtly romance about the ancient city of Troy and Greek mythical heroes, originally written by Raoul Lefevre and translated by an English merchant named William Caxton.

Based in Bruges, Belgium – famous for its production of manuscripts – he was in the right place and had the right connections to learn about the soon-to-boom printing industry. When it came to choosing his first work in English, *The Recuyell* had clear advantages: the Burgundian court ruling the Low Countries couldn't get enough of Greek mythology. Even more shrewdly, Caxton dedicated the book to Margaret of Burgundy, sister of the English king Edward IV, ensuring it would be popular across the Channel.

Sure enough, the success of *The Recuyell*, published in 1473–74, encouraged Caxton to make a business of English books. A year later, he printed *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* and set up a press in Westminster, London, before the decade was out, where he published a version of *The Canterbury Tales*.

DID YOU KNOW?

INDECENT PROPOSAL
In 1186, Sibylla, heir to the throne of Jerusalem, was told that to become queen she would have to divorce her husband, Guy de Lusignan. She agreed as long as she could pick her next spouse. At her coronation, she chose Guy again.

ATOMS FOR PEACE
America's Project Plowshare was devised in the Cold War to come up with peaceful ways of using nuclear energy – displaying the power, minus the destruction. One idea involved dropping bombs to widen the Panama Canal.

HARD TO READ
When US businessman Timothy Dexter published his book *A Pickle for the Knowing Ones* (1802), it contained no punctuation. He later released an edition with extra pages of nothing but punctuation, to be added as readers pleased.

BONAPARTE IN AMERICA
The Bureau of Information, the predecessor of the FBI, was established in 1908 by the US attorney general, Charles Joseph Bonaparte. He was the grandson of Jerome Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon.

How old are candy canes?

SHORT ANSWER Fact and folklore are all twisted and turned when it comes to the history of the Christmas icon

LONG ANSWER A legend claims that candy canes were invented in 17th-century Cologne, when a choirmaster ordered sugar sticks from a local sweetmaker to keep his choirboys quiet during a long Christmas Eve service. He made them hooked to resemble shepherds' crooks, and so keep the boys' minds on the birth of Christ.

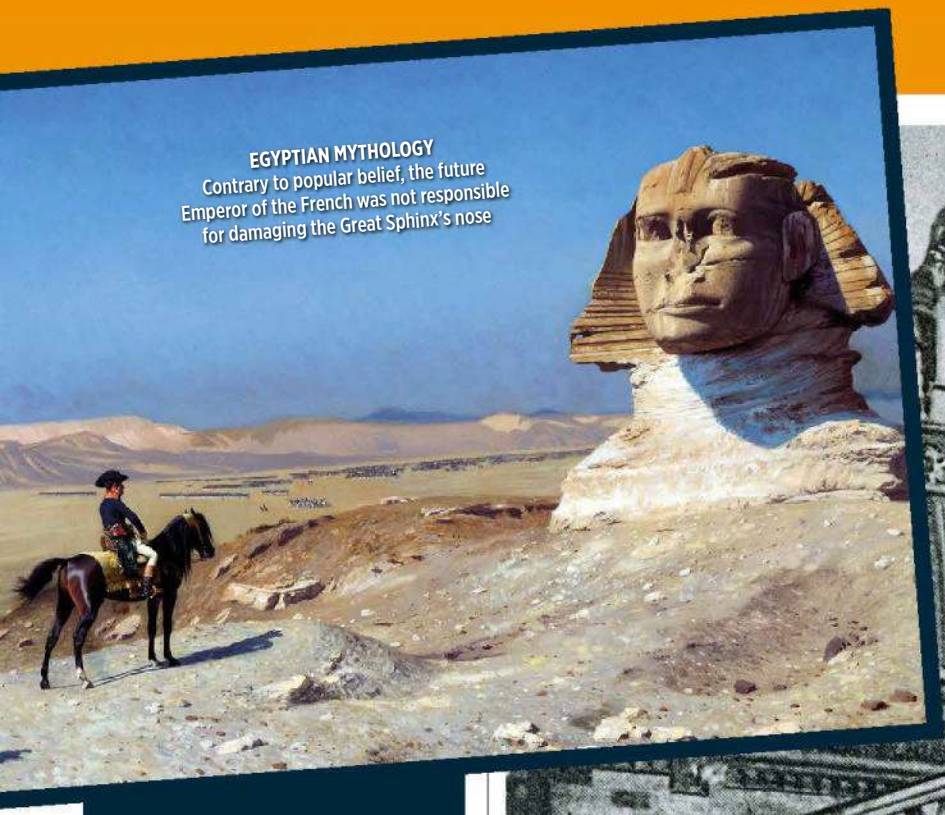
Yet while it does look like the Christmas treat did come from Germany, the true history is less neatly wrapped in a nice story. At some point, sugar sticks became popular in Europe, before coming to the US in 1847 thanks to a German-Swedish immigrant named August Imgard. They were white and sugary only, however, with the red stripes and peppermint flavouring added at a later date.

LIKE A KID OUTSIDE A SWEET SHOP
Candy canes were initially popular in Europe before crossing the pond in 1847

Who was the first US-born president?

SHORT ANSWER Martin Van Buren was the first true-born all-American

LONG ANSWER George Washington may have been the first US president, unanimously elected in 1789, but when he was born in 1732 his home of Virginia was a British colony. The same was true for the birthplaces of the six presidents that followed him, from John Adams to Andrew Jackson. The US had to wait until its eighth president, Martin Van Buren (*depicted right*), for a leader who had been born following the Declaration of Independence of 1776.



EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY
Contrary to popular belief, the future Emperor of the French was not responsible for damaging the Great Sphinx's nose

Did Napoleon blast the Sphinx's nose off?

PODCAST

Answered by Dr Mark Lehner, world-renowned archaeologist and leading expert on the Giza pyramid complex

The notion that Napoleon and his soldiers deliberately defaced the Great Sphinx of Giza with cannon is unfounded. The missing nose of the Sphinx can be traced back to centuries before Napoleon's time. The Arab historian Al-Maqrīzī noted its absence in 1401, and evidence suggests it was already damaged by the 11th century AD.

Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 was, in fact, a turning point in the cultivation of Egyptology. Accompanied by a team of engineers, surveyors and scholars, he embarked on a mission to document and understand Egypt's ancient civilisation. While his army engaged the Mamluks in conflict, these experts tirelessly recorded temples and monuments.

Napoleon's expedition had both colonial and scholarly aspects, but it marked the birth of modern Egyptology, uncovering the wonders of ancient Egypt rather than vandalising its heritage.

▶ To hear more from Dr Mark Lehner on the history of Egypt's pyramids, visit *historyextra.com/pyramids-pod*

GETTY IMAGES X3

THE BIRTH OF A NEW ERA
A huge crowd gathers in Berlin to watch Philipp Scheidemann proclaim the birth of the German Republic on 9 November 1918. The Republic's constitution, however, was adopted in Weimar, leading it to become known as the 'Weimar Republic'

GOING ON THE RUN
Kaiser Wilhelm II (*centre, wearing fur collar*) waits for a train in the Dutch town of Eijsden, having fled Germany

PODCAST

What was the Weimar Republic?

Answered by Frank McDonough, emeritus professor of international history at Liverpool John Moores University

Established during the aftermath of World War I, the Weimar Republic marked a turbulent period in German history. With Kaiser Wilhelm II's abdication, a provisional government was proclaimed in Berlin on 9 November 1918. Two days later, Wilhelm was in exile in the Netherlands and the war was over. The new republic overturned Imperial Germany's partial democracy, where the Reichstag had been able to pass legislation only with the kaiser's consent. Although it retained the empire's official moniker (the 'German Reich'), the republic became synonymous with the city of Weimar, where its constitution was adopted in August 1919, formally abolishing the monarchy.

This sudden transition toward republicanism was tumultuous and was overseen by the Social Democrat Party. These socialists, akin to Britain's Labour Party, sought reform but not revolution. Nevertheless, a left-wing faction, the United Social Democrats, lobbied for a more radical transformation akin to the Soviet model. The tension between these groups shaped the early Weimar Republic, with figures like Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann advocating for a liberal democratic state, while the extreme wing of Social Democrats favoured workers' councils over 'bourgeois' elections. Alongside punishing wartime reparations to the Allies and economic hardship, the Weimar Republic's brief existence served as a breeding ground for political instability and extremism.

▶ To hear more from Professor Frank McDonough on the Weimar Republic, visit *historyextra.com/weimar-republic-pod*

AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB
A 1778 painting by Richard Samuel depicts some of the Bluestockings as the Nine Muses of Greek mythology

17
The number of surviving love letters written by King Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn during their courtship. None of her replies have survived, however.

Who could join the Bluestockings?

SHORT ANSWER While an intellectual safe space for 18th-century well-to-do women, men weren't excluded

LONG ANSWER Educated women of the 18th century had limited means to participate in intellectual discussions, despite a growing desire to share in the Age of Enlightenment. So around the 1750s, a group of aristocratic women, headed by reformers like Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Vesey, started their own movement. The idea was simple: bring people together for discourse on a number of artistic and scientific fields.

Not only women were invited to these salons, with men such as dictionary extraordinaire Samuel Johnson regularly attending. In fact, it was from a male participant that the name 'Bluestocking' originated. Unable to afford formal black or white stockings, Benjamin Stillingfleet would show up in blue worsted stockings, causing him some embarrassment but coming to represent the informality of the salons.

Montagu became known as the 'queen of the blues' and inspired a second generation of Bluestockings, but their popularity waned by the end of the 18th century.

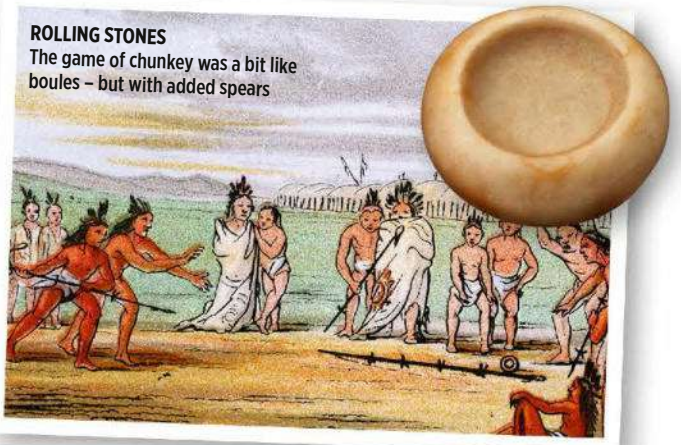
How did the sport of chunkey work?

SHORT ANSWER The Native American game tested players' throwing arms – and their ability to take a loss

LONG ANSWER Originating in the Cahokia region of modern-day Missouri, various Native American tribes enjoyed chunkey for centuries. 'Enjoyed' is perhaps the wrong word, though: the sport was practice for hunting or battle, and designed to be taken extremely seriously.

Chunkey worked a little like boules. A stone disk would be rolled along the ground and, while still moving, two players would have to throw spears to where they predicted the disk would end up. The first to a predetermined score won.

While the mechanics were simple to learn, chunkey offered the players a chance to demonstrate their much-sought-after throwing skills. Such was its place in society that chunkey was widely gambled on, and there are even stories of losers taking their own lives.



ROLLING STONES
The game of chunkey was a bit like boules – but with added spears

Who was behind the Great Moon Hoax?

SHORT ANSWER The 1835 'discoveries' read like a bad sci-fi novel, but people still believed them

LONG ANSWER Lush vegetation and lakes, formations of mountainous crystals and creatures everywhere: unicorn-like goats, bipedal beavers and – most astonishingly of all – a race of furry 'bat people'. These were a handful of the sights spotted on the Moon, according to the journalists of a newspaper named *The Sun* (no, not that one) in 1835. This discovery of life had been made by the eminent British astronomer Sir John Herschel "by means of a telescope of vast dimensions and an entirely new principle".

Of course, the whole thing was a hoax. Concocted by British writer Richard Adams Locke, the articles were likely intended as satire, poking fun at other so-called scientific claims of life on the Moon. Herschel, needless to say, had no part in it. But this was a time of religious resurgence, where outlandish theories could take root. *The Sun*'s stories became a widely believed global phenomenon for a while. Christian missionaries even inquired about the possibility of sending Bibles to the 'Verspertilio-homo', or man-bats.

LUNAR LIES
A New York newspaper hoax duped surprising numbers of people into thinking that the Moon was inhabited by hordes of 'man-bats'

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WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND
An elderly almshouse resident relaxes with her pet cat, 1944. Cats have been associated with women throughout history

HATCHET MOG
Felines were a common motif in anti-suffragette propaganda

PODCAST

Why are cats linked to the 'old spinster' stereotype?

Answered by Dr Andrew Flack, senior lecturer in modern and environmental history at the University of Bristol

Comparisons between women and cats have been applied in a variety of contexts through history.

In the early 20th century, for example, the connection was used in anti-suffragette propaganda. Cats, typically depicted as looking forlorn and within domestic settings, were deployed as a cautionary symbol. They served as a stark warning to those who sympathised with suffragettes, conveying the message that a woman's place – just like that of a domestic cat – was inside the home, rather than as a political activist out protesting in the streets.

Interestingly, the suffragettes also appropriated feline imagery for their own ends, reversing its symbolism to present the government as a predatory cat, cruel and violent in its dealings with women. This shift illustrated how the image of the cat could be employed to subvert the narrative.

Regarding the more specific connection between cats and spinsters (and the stereotype of the 'crazy cat lady'), this may lie in the solitary nature of felines themselves, as well as the traditional association made between cats and 'deviant' single women accused of witchcraft.

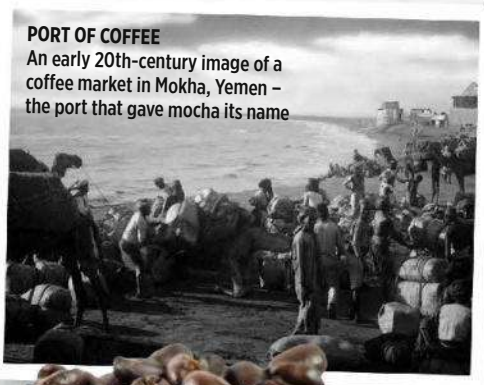
Overall, such examples testify to an enduring association between women, cats and societal expectations, which still resonates today.

▶ **To hear more from Dr Andrew Flack on the history of cats, go to *historyextra.com/cats-everything-pod***

Why is it called a mocha?

SHORT ANSWER The chocolatey coffee honours the old heart of the bean trade

LONG ANSWER Until the 19th century, one of the most important places in the global coffee business was the port of Mokha, or Mocha, in Yemen, with beans shipped out of there in huge quantities to try and satisfy the love of the drink in Europe. So synonymous did the port become with Arabia's trade that the beans themselves became known as mochas, and they were famous for having an almost chocolatey taste. So despite the first chocolate coffee drinks coming from Italy – the *bavareisa* and *bicerin* being the forerunners of today's mocha – the name of the Yemeni port was adopted by bean lovers everywhere.



PORT OF COFFEE
An early 20th-century image of a coffee market in Mokha, Yemen – the port that gave mocha its name

When was the city of Pompeii founded?

SHORT ANSWER Several civilisations laid the foundations of the Roman marvel before its destruction

LONG ANSWER The story of Pompeii's unfortunate end – consumed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 and buried under ash – has been repeated countless times. But far less understood is the Roman city's beginning, and why it was ever built in the shadow of a volcano in the first place.

When the Oscan-speaking peoples of Campania settled there in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, they were attracted by the access to the River Sarno, the fine climate and, ironically enough, the fertile volcanic soils. Not that anyone knew that Vesuvius was a disaster waiting to happen; it had long laid dormant. The Greeks, Phoenicians, Etruscans and local Samnites all inhabited Pompeii or made use of it as a port, before the Romans came along around the fourth century BC.

Still, it wouldn't be until 89 BC that the town fell under Roman dominion as a colony, named Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum. Pompeii thrived as a bustling trading centre, powered by its olive groves and vineyards, and as a stylish getaway destination for Rome's rich and famous. A warning sign did come with a huge earthquake in AD 62, but not enough to prepare the Pompeiians for their ultimate doom 17 years later.

JUST ROMAN AROUND
The ruins of Pompeii attract around 3 million visitors every year

RITUAL HUMILIATION
A pair of women, their heads shaved and daubed with swastikas, are forced to march through Paris as punishment for their alleged collaboration with German soldiers

PODCAST

What was the 'épuration'?

Answered by **Julian Jackson**, emeritus professor of modern French history at Queen Mary University of London

Following the liberation of France in 1944, a phenomenon known as the *épuration* ('purification') began. Before formal courts were established, reprisals against alleged Nazi collaborators took place across the country, with makeshift tribunals settling scores in small towns and villages. This entailed the humiliation of a great number of women, some of whom had swastikas drawn or tattooed onto their shaved scalps. They often faced scorn for engaging in 'horizontal collaboration' with German soldiers, or for simply flirting with them.

However, beneath this disturbing spectacle lay deeper anxieties about masculinity and gender roles in a nation recovering from the humiliation of four years of occupation. French men, feeling as though they had failed their country, sought to reassert their virility and entrench the values of the Resistance. The important role of women in the Resistance only started to be acknowledged in later years, meaning that many found themselves becoming scapegoats for the nation's trauma.

▶ To hear more from Professor Julian Jackson on France's liberation, as well as the trial of Vichy leader Marshal Pétain, visit *historyextra.com/petain-pod*

IDEALISED BEAUTY
Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* depicts the Three Graces of Greek mythology with the pale complexions popular among Renaissance women – a look that was sometimes achieved by applying toxic lead-based cosmetics

GETTY IMAGES X2

What were the essentials of a Renaissance beauty regime?

PODCAST

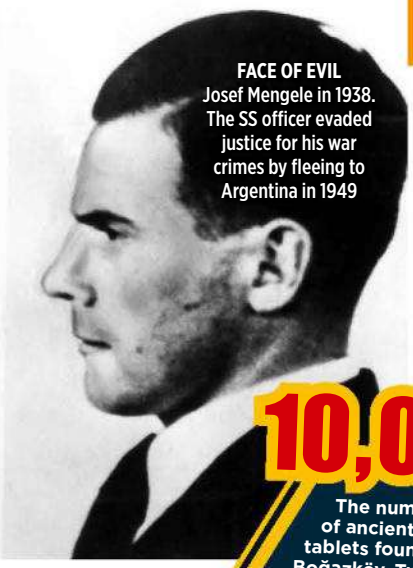
Answered by **Professor Jill Burke**, author of *How to be a Renaissance Woman: The Untold History of Beauty and Female Creativity* (Profile Books, 2023)

During the Renaissance, the pursuit of beauty involved various routines and homemade concoctions. One of the staples in women's beauty regimes was the use of 'waters', such as bean flower water distilled from sweet-smelling broad bean blossoms. These blends served as gentle cleansers. Prior to cleansing, a homemade exfoliant created from simple breadcrumbs soaked in scented water was sometimes used to ensure a smooth visage. Some even used them as overnight masks. After cleansing, women might apply fat-based lotions. Violet oil, crafted from sweet violet flowers steeped in olive oil, was a popular choice.

For a more traditional moisturiser, some concocted lotions using sheep's tallow, rich in vitamin E, infusing them with scents like gum mastic or frankincense. These kept the skin hydrated and helped minimise wrinkles. To tame unruly hair, products were created by blending mallow roots, psyllium seeds and willow leaves, resulting in a leave-in conditioner that effectively managed flyaway strands. Despite our modern understanding of lead poisoning, Renaissance women also readily lavished their faces with toxic lead-based cosmetics to lighten their complexions.

Finally, a subtle touch of sandalwood rouge on the cheeks and lips completed the quintessential Renaissance look.

▶ To hear more from Professor Jill Burke on Renaissance beauty regimes, visit *historyextra.com/renaissance-beauty-pod*



FACE OF EVIL
Josef Mengele in 1938. The SS officer evaded justice for his war crimes by fleeing to Argentina in 1949

PODCAST

Why did so many Nazis flee to Argentina?

Answered by Gerald Posner, bestselling author and award-winning investigative journalist

After World War II, a large number of Nazis sought refuge in Argentina. Not only did the country's physical distance provide a buffer against capture, but it had also served as the largest listening post for Nazi intelligence outside Europe. Despite being neutral for much of the war, the Argentinian government held Nazi sympathies and actively welcomed German immigrants.

Many within Argentina's German community believed that the Allies had imposed what they called a 'victor's justice' by putting Nazi leaders on trial for war crimes, and it was this view that led to figures like Josef Mengele (the notorious 'Angel of Death', who conducted medical experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz) escaping overseas to join them.

Ultimately, Mengele and other high-ranking Nazis knew that they wouldn't be arriving into a vacuum: there was already a well-established Nazi network in Argentina, and a welcoming community willing to shield them.

▶ To hear more from Gerald Posner, including the story of his search for Josef Mengele, visit *historyextra.com/posner-pod*

10,000
The number of ancient clay tablets found near Boğazköy, Turkey, in 1906. Once translated, they shone new light on the Hittite empire, about which very little was known.

What was the Christmas Bullet?

SHORT ANSWER Ignore the festive name – this was far from a present to the world of aviation

LONG ANSWER

Look up the worst aircraft ever made and chances are the Christmas Bullet will pop up. Invented in the early days of aviation by a man with zero aeronautical or engineering experience, a doctor named William Whitney Christmas, its major design flaw was that the wings weren't supported by struts or braces. Instead, they would 'flap' in the wind, like a bird.

Having convinced enough people to let him build his plane, Christmas ignored demands to restrict testing to the ground and the Bullet had its maiden flight in January 1919. The wings fell off and the plane crashed, killing the pilot. A couple of months later, he tried again and the exact same thing happened. The Christmas Bullet was abandoned with a record of two flights and two fatalities.

BIRD-BRAINED IDEA
The wings of the Christmas Bullet were designed to flap in the wind – a fatal design flaw

GETTY IMAGES X5, ALAMY X2

CAMEL? LOTS!
There are thought to be more than a million Arabian camels in Australia, despite not being a native species

How long have camels been in Australia?

SHORT ANSWER Admittedly, their introduction could have started with less of a bang...

LONG ANSWER

Australia has a veritable menagerie of iconic animals, from the kangaroo and koala to the duck-billed platypus and quokka. In the deserts of the country, however, an invasive species has been growing for 180 years: camels. In fact, with estimates of over a million today, it may just be the largest population of Arabian camels in the world.

Camels were first introduced by British settlers to explore the Outback. They were well-suited to the terrain, so as many as 20,000 were transported to Australia from India, Afghanistan and the Middle East between 1870 and 1920.

But the experiment got off to a rather unfortunate start. From the first imported herd in 1840, only one of the animals – Harry – survived the long and arduous journey. Sadly, Harry was then put down six years later after knocking into his owner and causing him to accidentally shoot himself with his own gun.

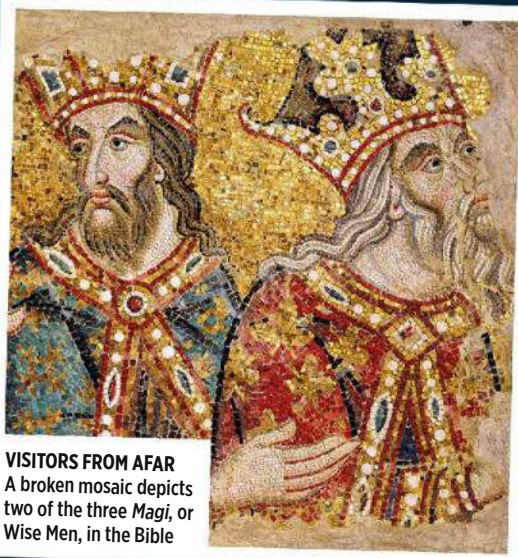
Where does the word ‘magic’ come from?

Answered by Owen Davies, professor of social history at the University of Hertfordshire and author of *Art of the Grimoire: An Illustrated History of Magic Books and Spells* (Yale University Press, 2023)

The word ‘magic’ has deep roots in ancient history, specifically the term *magoi*, which was used by the Greeks to describe non-Greeks, whose religious practices they considered alien and exotic. In essence, magic was the religion of the *magoi*, and the term would later be the source of the word *Magi* – a name for the Three Wise Men in the Bible.

Overall, the story behind the origins of the word illustrates one of the main challenges when it comes to defining magic itself. Throughout history, magic has been used to denote the religious practices of the ‘other’, whether it be Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation or the ancient divide between Christians and pagans.

▶ To hear more from Professor Owen Davies on the history of magic, visit *historyextra.com/magic-history-pod*



VISITORS FROM AFAR A broken mosaic depicts two of the three *Magi*, or Wise Men, in the Bible

HISTORY EXTRA PODCAST

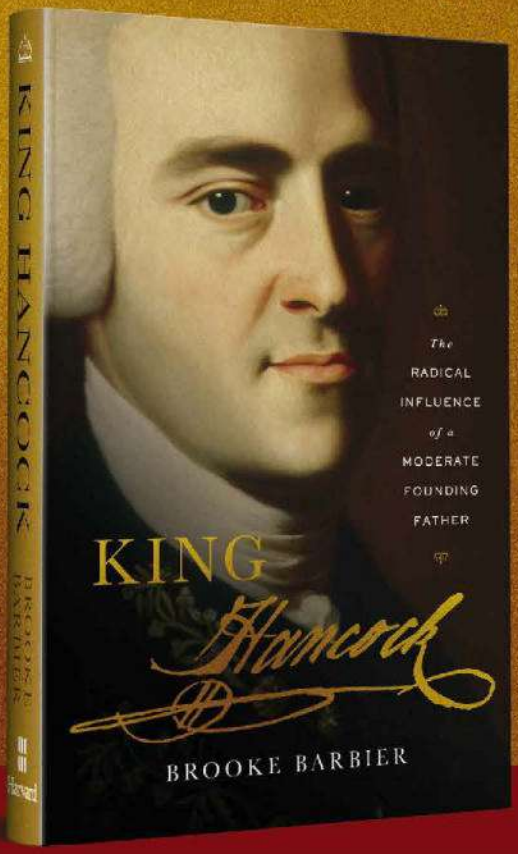
LISTEN

To access all the podcast episodes mentioned in this month’s Miscellany section, visit *historyextra.com/miscellany* or scan the QR code

A portrait of the paradoxical patriot, whose measured pragmatism helped make American independence a reality.

“American history buffs will enjoy the immersive portrait of Boston’s Revolutionary era.”

—Publishers Weekly



“A concise and highly readable biography… [Hancock’s] legacy is very much worth our remembering.”

—Wall Street Journal

Harvard University Press

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Christmas
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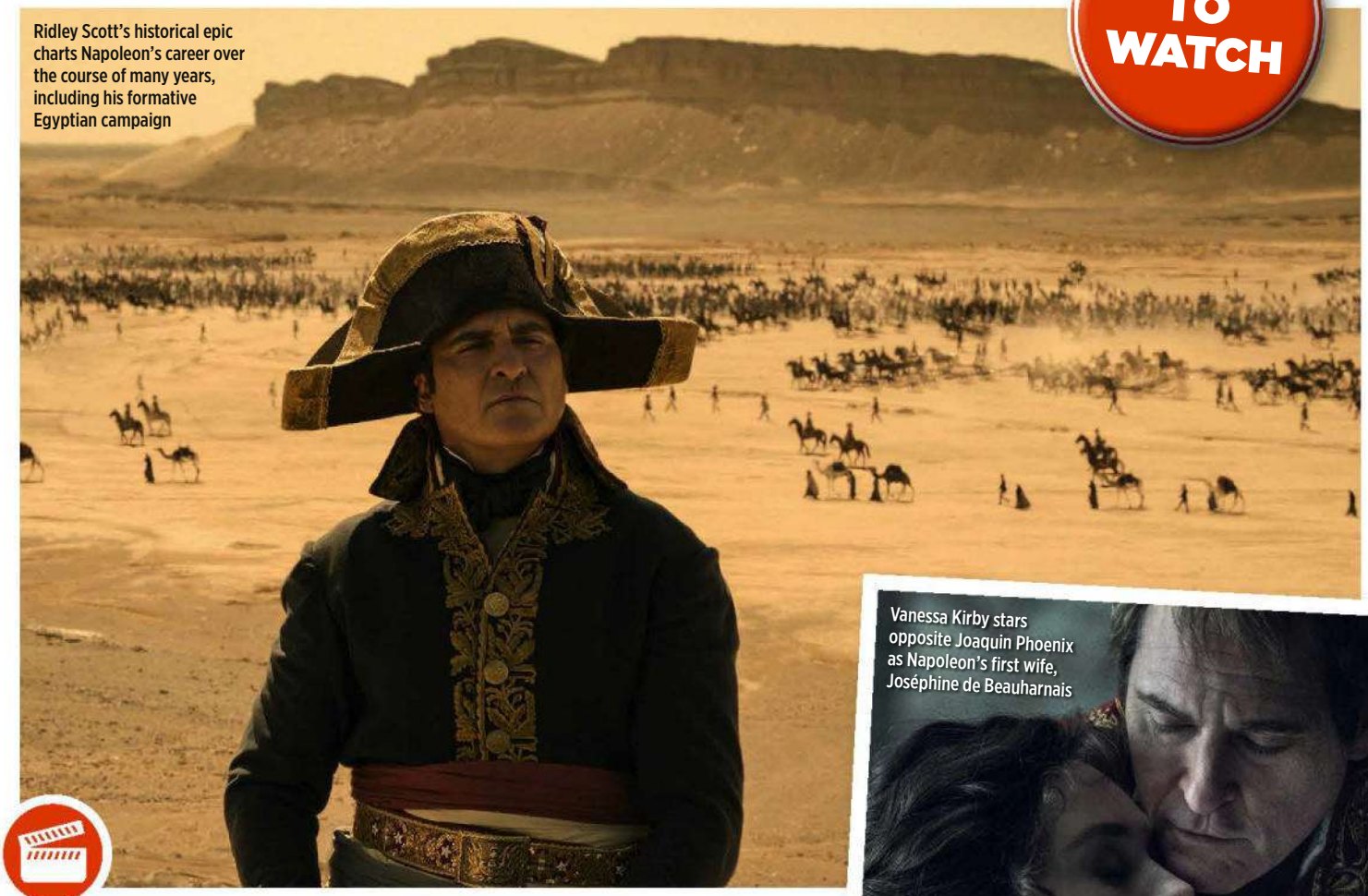
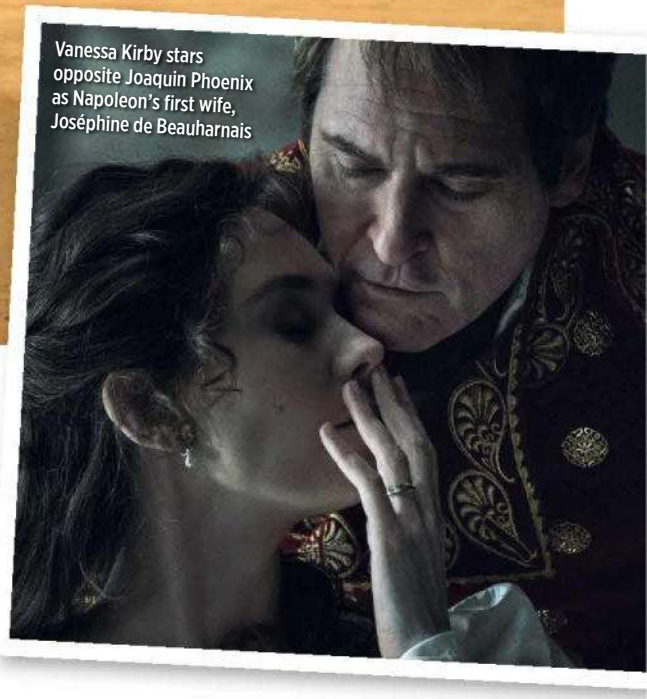
RadioTimes
ON SALE FROM 9 DECEMBER
#ChristmasRadioTimes
RadioTimes

ONE TO WATCH



Ridley Scott's historical epic charts Napoleon's career over the course of many years, including his formative Egyptian campaign



Vanessa Kirby stars opposite Joaquin Phoenix as Napoleon's first wife, Joséphine de Beauharnais

Epoch-defining leader

Napoleon / In cinemas now and streaming later via Apple TV+

At the time of the *coup d'état* of 18 Brumaire, which brought Napoleon Bonaparte to power as first consul of France in 1799, the future emperor was just 30 years old. He would not live far past his 50th birthday, dying in exile on the British-controlled Saint Helena, a remote Atlantic island off the coast of West Africa, in 1821.

In between these dates, Napoleon was twice emperor and, despite catastrophic failures such as the invasion of Russia in 1812 and ultimate defeat at the hands of a coalition of European powers at Waterloo in 1815, forged an enduring reputation as a brilliant, if authoritarian, politician and an innovative military leader. If that weren't enough in itself, the story of Napoleon's love affair with his first wife, Joséphine de Beauharnais, continues to enthral successive generations.

Napoleon's story has long fascinated veteran film director Ridley Scott. "Napoleonic history is the beginning of modern history," he has said. "[Napoleon] changed the world, he rewrote the rulebook." How to do justice to such a story? Few would seem to be better qualified than Scott, whose Academy Award-winning *Gladiator* (2000) reintroduced cinema audiences to the historical epic.

Scripted by David Scarpa, who has also written a Scott-directed *Gladiator* sequel that's due in cinemas next year, *Napoleon* stars Joaquin Phoenix (who played Commodus, the tormentor of Russell Crowe's Maximus) in the title role. Playing Joséphine is Vanessa Kirby (Princess Margaret in *The Crown*).

As to what we should expect from the film, it will explore how Napoleon rose to power and will certainly feature some spectacular battle scenes. It will also try to make sense of the sometimes unhealthy dynamic between Napoleon and Joséphine. Why was it that, even as he advanced on Moscow, Napoleon was obsessed with what his wife might be doing back in Paris?

APPLE TV+ X2

WEEKLY TV & RADIO
Visit ***historyextra.com*** for updates on upcoming TV and radio programmes

Ronald Reagan's famous call to "tear down" the Berlin Wall is among the speeches put under the microscope in an *Archive on 4* documentary

Finding the right words

Archive on 4: Speaking to the People / Saturday 25 November

The advent of radio in the 1920s gave US presidents a new way to reach their citizens. From Warren G Harding onwards, successive leaders have tried to make the most of this opportunity. But which presidents have made the biggest impact through their broadcasts on radio and, later, TV?

This is among the questions considered by Cody Keenan, former head of speechwriting to Barack Obama, as he looks back through the archives, including at speeches he studied as he honed his craft.

Speeches featured in the show include Franklin D Roosevelt's Inaugural Address during the Great Depression, when he declared, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself"; John F Kennedy's call for the US to send astronauts to the Moon; and Ronald Reagan's call for the destruction of the Berlin Wall.

A 19th-century painting depicts Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon. A new three-part BBC Two series examines the general's path to power, and Rome's transition from republic to empire

A thirst for power

Julius Caesar: The Making of a Dictator / BBC Two, Monday 20 November

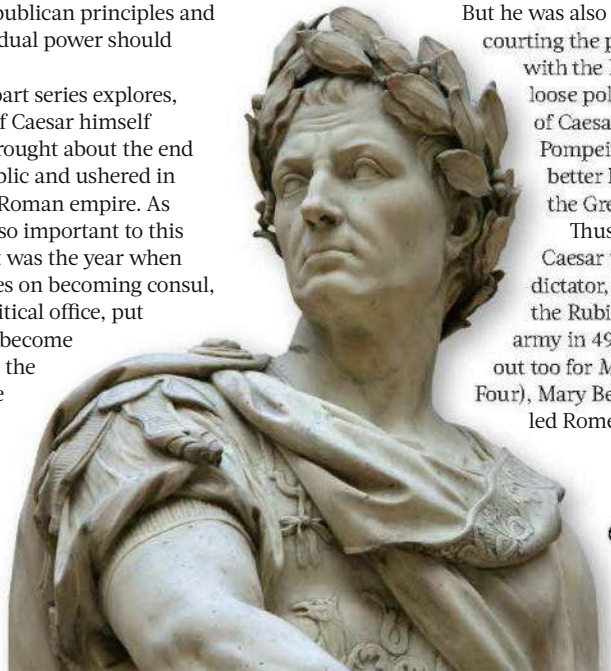
In 63 BC, when Julius Caesar (100 BC–44 BC) was in his thirties, Rome was still a republic. And while you would struggle to call the Rome of this era a democracy in any modern sense, it was organised along republican principles and the idea that individual power should be held in check.

As a new three-part series explores, it was the actions of Caesar himself that in great part brought about the end of the Roman republic and ushered in the creation of the Roman empire. As for why 63 BC was so important to this story, it's because it was the year when Caesar, with his eyes on becoming consul, Rome's highest political office, put himself forward to become *pontifex maximus*, the high priest of Rome and a position of enormous influence.

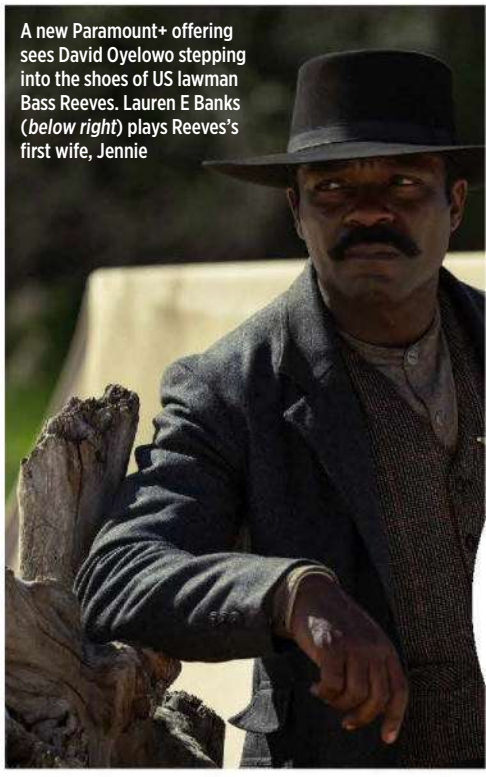
Against the odds, Caesar secured the position, but not without falling heavily into debt to Crassus, known as "the richest man in Rome". In his political life, the Caesar of this era was a populist, a man who often appealed directly to the people.

But he was also canny when it came to courting the powerful, as he proved with the First Triumvirate, a loose political alliance consisting of Caesar, Crassus and Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, the general better known as Pompey the Great.

Thus the scene was set for Caesar to eventually become dictator, the man who crossed the Rubicon at the head of an army in 49 BC. In December, look out too for *Meet the Emperor* (BBC Four), Mary Beard's take on those who led Rome in the wake of Caesar.



Caesar ruled as Rome's dictator from 49–44 BC



A new Paramount+ offering sees David Oyelowo stepping into the shoes of US lawman Bass Reeves. Lauren E Banks (*below right*) plays Reeves's first wife, Jennie

GETTY IMAGES X4, JUSTIN DOWNING/NETFLIX X1, DES WILLIE/NETFLIX X1, PARAMOUNT X2

Right royal saga

The Crown / Netflix, streaming now (with more episodes to follow on Thursday 14 December)

Newcomers Meg Bellamy and Ed McVey play Kate Middleton and Prince William during their St Andrews University years

As Peter Morgan's *The Crown* reaches its sixth and final season, it's safe to say that more and more viewers will have their own memories of many of the events shown on screen. In particular, the death of Princess Diana is, like the assassination of JFK to those around in 1963, a defining moment in recent history.

Not surprisingly, the relationship of Diana (Elizabeth Debicki) and Dodi Fayed (Khalid Abdalla) features strongly in the opening four episodes of the series, now available to stream. According to Debicki, it was especially difficult to recreate Diana's final days in Paris, in part because this necessitated she and her co-star being trailed by actors playing paparazzi. "You only have to be in a situation like that for about a minute before you realise this is completely unbearable," she has said.

Another six episodes follow on Thursday 14 December. Among other highlights, season six will feature Queen Elizabeth II (Imelda Staunton) looking back on her reign from the perspective of her Golden Jubilee, in 2002; and the 2005 marriage between Prince Charles (Dominic West) and Camilla (Olivia Williams).

Further reminding viewers how close we are getting to the present day, Prince William (Ed McVey and, as the young prince, Rufus Kampa) emerges as a major character. The final tranche of episodes follows the future heir to the throne as he begins university life at St Andrews, where he first meets one Kate Middleton (Meg Bellamy).

Famous faces in the cast include Jonathan Pryce as Prince Philip and Lesley Manville as Princess Margaret.

Elizabeth Debicki reprises her role as Diana, showing both the princess's charity work and her final, difficult days in Paris

Frontier life

Lawmen: Bass Reeves / Paramount+, streaming now

Born into slavery in Arkansas, the real-life Bass Reeves escaped from bondage at some point during the American Civil War. He subsequently became a deputy US marshal, one of the first black men to follow this career and the first to serve west of the Mississippi. Reeves worked often among Native Americans in the so-called Indian Territories.

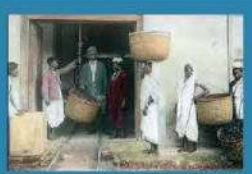
In the first series of a new anthology show, he's brought to the screen by David Oyelowo (*Selma*, *A United Kingdom*), who plays Reeves as a man who struggles with the moral and spiritual costs of his chosen profession. This was despite clearly being good at his job, someone who arrested as many as 3,000 outlaws yet, according to the history books, was never once wounded.

The show's supporting cast are some familiar faces, including Dennis Quaid (*Great Balls of Fire!*) as Deputy US Marshal Sherrill Lynn and, in a recurring role, Donald Sutherland (*M*A*S*H*, *Klute*) as Judge Isaac Parker, who was dubbed 'Hanging Judge' Parker – hardly surprising when you learn he sentenced 160 people to death, of whom 79 were executed.

Future series of *Lawmen* will focus on other lawmen and outlaws, and explore their enduring impact on American history.

Colonialism and char

Empire of Tea / BBC Radio 4, weekdays from Monday 4 December

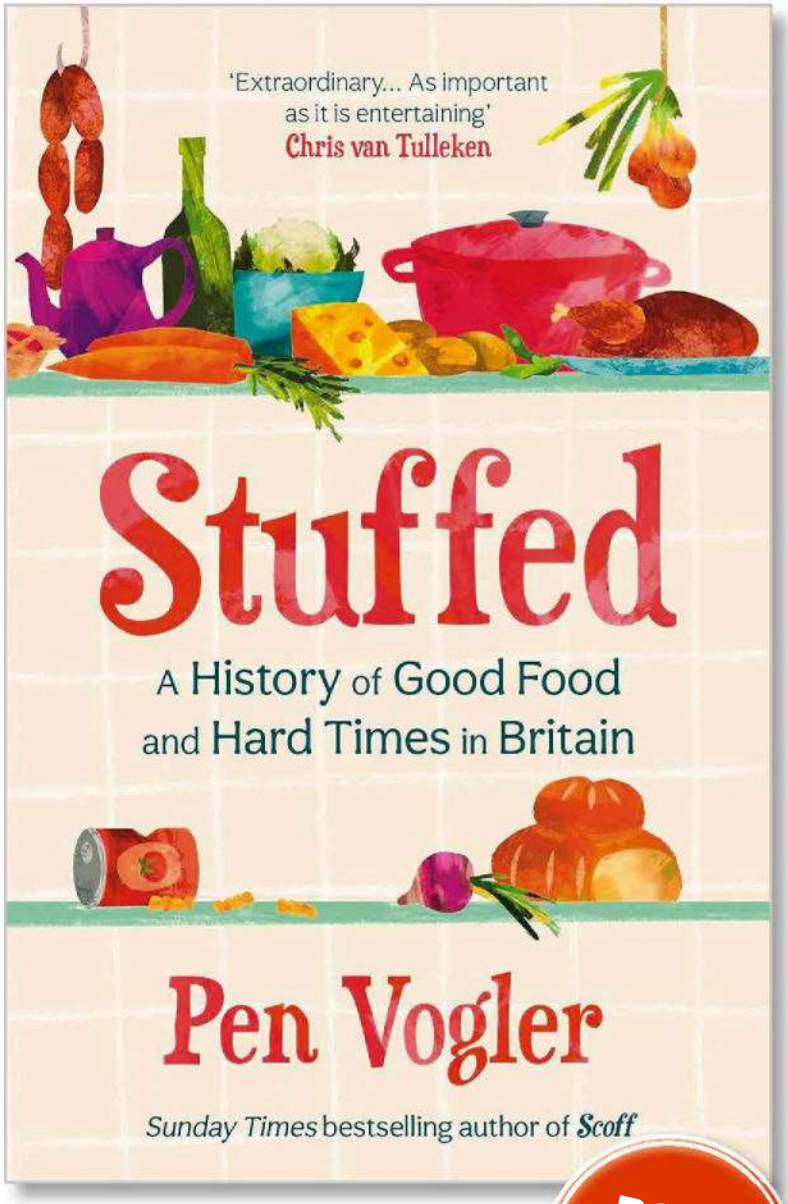


The idea of a nice cuppa is central to British life, yet, suggests writer and broadcaster Sathnam Sanghera, we should perhaps be more aware of the history of one of the nation's favourite beverages – and in particular its role in the country's colonial past.

Over 10 weekday episodes, the author of *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain* looks at topics such as how tea impacted Britain's relationship with China, and how plantations – where working conditions were poor – kept up with British demands.

BOOKS & PODCASTS

THIS MONTH'S BEST HISTORICAL READS AND LISTENS


'Extraordinary... As important as it is entertaining'
Chris van Tulleken
Stuffed
A History of Good Food and Hard Times in Britain
Pen Vogler
Sunday Times bestselling author of Scoff

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Stuffed: A History of Good Food and Hard Times in Britain

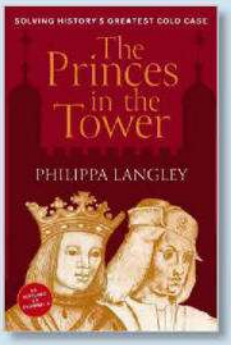
By Pen Vogler
Atlantic, £22, hardback, 464 pages

This culinary history of Britain looks at the foods that sustained, nourished or delighted its inhabitants in times of plenty and times of hardship. Along the way it explores a vast expanse of time, from the Neolithic period to the present, and a wide array of themes: family, power, our relationship with nature, and more. If that sounds heavy, it really isn't: that's partly because each chapter focuses on an individual foodstuff, and partly because Pen Vogler is warm, wise company throughout.

The Princes in the Tower: Solving History's Greatest Cold Case

By Philippa Langley
The History Press, £25, hardback, 488 pages

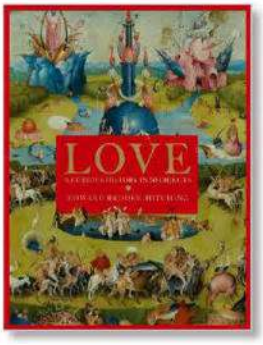
Philippa Langley made global headlines back in 2012 thanks to her key role in the discovery of Plantagenet king Richard III beneath a Leicester car park. Here, she outlines her recent work on The Missing Princes Project, an initiative set up in 2016 to explore what happened to the 'Princes in the Tower': Edward V and Richard, Duke of York. Were they really murdered on the orders of their uncle, Richard III? Its findings look set to challenge the traditional narrative...

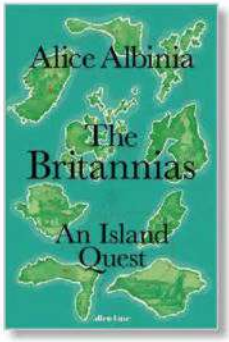


Love: A Curious History

By Edward Brooke-Hitching
Simon & Schuster, £30, hardback, 256 pages

As first lines go, "The idea for this book was found in the armpits of 19th-century rural Austrian women" is certainly striking (let's just say those armpits held an unusual love token). It's typical of Edward Brooke-Hitching's lively, idiosyncratic style, which is firmly on display in this rummage through 50 objects linked to romance. From flying phalluses to coded confessions, from its first flowering to its final, poignant end, this is a suitably charming and ramshackle visual guide to that crazy little thing called love.





The Britannias: An Island Quest

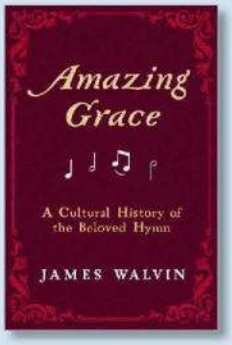
By Alice Albinia
Allen Lane, £25, hardback, 512 pages

Lace up your walking boots and head off on this tour through the history of Britain's islands. In tracing the nation's geographical periphery, author and journalist Alice Albinia also, fittingly, sets out to recentre the narrative on stories sometimes pushed to the margins: those of women, for instance, or of people regarded with suspicion. Part history, part travelogue, and by turns evocative and opinionated, this is an engrossing exploration of how a land shapes its people.

Amazing Grace: A Cultural History of the Beloved Hymn

By James Walvin
University of California Press, £16.99, hardback, 216 pages

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / That saved a wretch like me. So opens 'Amazing Grace', a hymn that – as historian James Walvin points out in the introduction to his latest book – is known and loved by millions. Tracing its connections to religion, to the slave trade, and to the tensions that continue to wrack the United States into the 21st century, this is an engaging cultural history of how music can bridge the gap between the past and the present.



The Armour of Light

By Ken Follett
Macmillan, £25, hardback, 752 pages

Readers who have been following hugely popular author Ken Follett's long-running, time-hopping Kingsbridge series will be eagerly anticipating this fifth instalment. Previous books have been set in the Dark Ages, the 12th century and the 1550s.

This time around, the year is 1792 and a clutch of the fictional town's residents find themselves caught up in the wider forces that would shape the age: industrialisation, tyranny, and the fight for freedom...

PODCAST WHAT TO LISTEN TO...

Each month we bring you three of our favourite podcasts from the BBC and HistoryExtra

History Behind the Headlines

historyextra.com/behindtheheadlines

If you sometimes struggle to keep up with the (often lengthy) backstory behind today's volatile, complex world, you're not alone. In this new monthly podcast series, professors Hannah Skoda and Rana Mitter are your guides to the history you need to know to make sense of the news – and the stories that see history itself hit the headlines.

Short History of... Jane Austen

bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gmsxxy

Get lost in Austen with this bijou guide to the English novelist's life, works and times. How much do we really know about the woman who wrote such classics as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*? And what is it about those works that continues to make them so popular, more than 200 years later?

Life of the Week: Mary I

historyextra.com/lifeoftheweek

HistoryExtra's new weekly podcast series profiling history's most compelling characters here turns its gaze to Mary I, the Tudor queen often lumbered with the soubriquet 'bloody'. But is her reputation fully deserved? And does it obscure other aspects of her story? Dr Nicola Tallis offers her expert insights.

ON THE PODCAST

CURATED HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HISTORYEXTRA PODCAST ARCHIVE

8 PODCAST EPISODES ABOUT ANCIENT GREECE

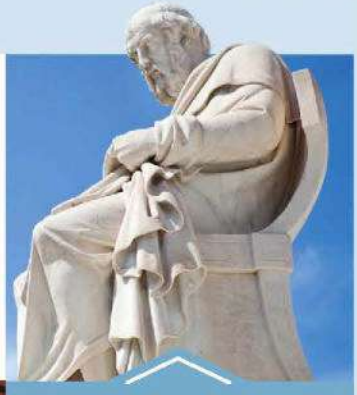
Want to learn more about the ancient Greeks? We've gathered together some of the best *HistoryExtra* podcast episodes on the topic, featuring Professor Paul Cartledge, Dr Jane Desborough, Natalie Haynes, Robin Waterfield and more...

THE LEGEND OF TROY

From the exploits of Agamemnon and Achilles to the alluring beauty of Helen of Sparta, the story of the Trojan War still fascinates people today. But was it based on actual events, or merely a tale cooked up by Homer? In this episode from 2022, Professor Paul Cartledge examines the evidence.

GREEK MYTHS

Back in January 2022, classicist Natalie Haynes came on the podcast to address some of the most common questions about Greek mythology, examining the tales of figures like Hercules and Aphrodite, and the ways in which these ancient stories have changed throughout history.



SPARTA

Recorded in October 2020, this episode sees Professor Andrew Bayliss discussing the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta, charting everything from the structure of everyday society to the Spartans' legendary clash with the Persians at the battle of Thermopylae.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Widely regarded as a key figure in the history of philosophy, Plato's presence looms large over Greek civilisation. But other than being a student of Socrates and the mentor of Aristotle, what else do we know about his life? In this recent episode, Robin Waterfield sheds light on the ancient thinker.

HOW THE GREEKS CHANGED THE WORLD

Professor Roderick Beaton joined us back in November 2021 to look at the ways Greece has changed human civilisation: from the staggering conquests of Alexander the Great to the emergence of the modern Greek nation in the 1820s.

ANCIENT GREECE: EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW

In this two-parter from summer 2020, Professor Paul Cartledge answers listeners' questions about ancient Greece. Along the way he offers insights into women's lives, the birth of the Olympics, and the origins of democracy.

ANCIENT GREEK SCIENTIFIC THINKING

In this instalment from January 2022, Science Museum curator Dr Jane Desborough discusses the ingenious tools and scientific methods that ancient Greek thinkers used in order to make sense of oceans, animals, the cosmos and the human body.

THE FATHER OF ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

Recorded as part of last year's *15 Minutes of Fame* series, intended to shine a light on overlooked historical figures, this short episode sees Professor Michael Scott introducing listeners to the sixth-century BC Athenian aristocrat Kleisthenes.

HISTORY EXTRA PODCAST

To hear to these episodes, plus thousands of others covering a wealth of historical topics, visit *historyextra.com/podcast*. You can also listen on platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

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CROSSWORD

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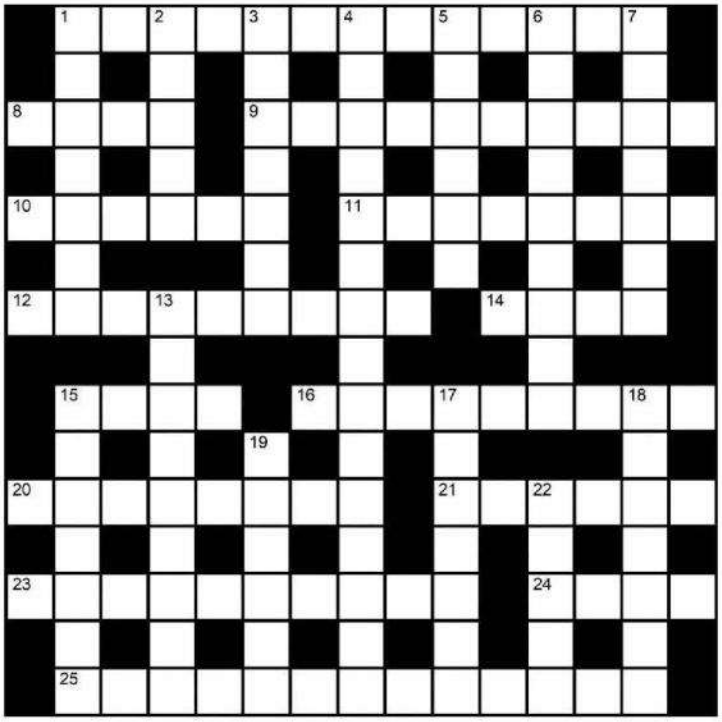
ACROSS

1 French Romantic composer (1803–69) (6,7)
8 To make stone tools from flint (4)
9 Chesapeake Bay military installation, built in 1819 (4,6)
10 London district, home to Bob Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol* (6)
11 Ancient language in use before 75 BC (3,5)
12 Philosophical work by Plato (9)
14/18/15D Anti-racism song recorded by Syl Johnson in 1969 (2,2,7,2,5)
15 State in the US midwest, admitted to the Union in 1846 (4)
16 Eric ___ (1926–84), English comedian (9)
20 Richard ___ (1904–2005), US poet (8)
21 Kingdom ruled by Odysseus, in Greek myth (6)
23 Temperature scale named after an 18th-century physicist (10)
24 Michel ___ (1941–2020), celebrated French chef (4)
25 Japanese dramatic art (6,7)

DOWN

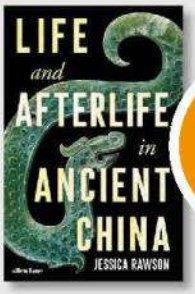
1 European country ruled by Miklós Horthy from 1920 to 1944 (7)
2 God of love and desire, in classical myth (5)
3 "Intellectual superiority ___ by its very existence" – Arthur Schopenhauer (7)
4 Brewing town in the West Midlands (6-4-5)
5 Term for an open-air shelter in the southwest US (6)



Set by Richard Smyth

6 Mediterranean bay, said to have been swum by the Greek heroine Io (6,3)
7 Supporter of the establishment of a Jewish homeland (7)
13 Seizure of authority (5,4)
15 See 14 Across
17 Letter – especially one written by Saint Paul (7)
18 See 14 Across
19 Ancient temple complex near Luxor in Egypt (6)
22 Geoff ___ (b1941), England footballer (5)

CHANCE TO WIN



BOOK WORTH £40 FOR THREE WINNERS

Life and Afterlife in Ancient China
by Jessica Rawson

HOW TO ENTER

Post entries to **BBC History Revealed, Christmas 2023 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to **christmas2023@historyrevealedcomps.co.uk** by noon on **15 January 2024**.

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SOLUTION Nº 126

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She kept her promise, and a gift to the Stroke Association was included in her Will. Sylvia's gift helped fund the work that made sure many more of us survive stroke now than did in her lifetime.

Sylvia changed the story for us all. Now it's our turn to change the story for those who'll come after us.

Stroke still shatters lives and tears families apart. And for so many survivors the road to recovery is still long and desperately lonely. If you or someone you love has been affected by stroke – you'll know just what that means.

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Discover the answers to a host of historical conundrums on a myriad of topics – from ancient animals to medical mysteries

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We will post your prizes out as soon as possible.

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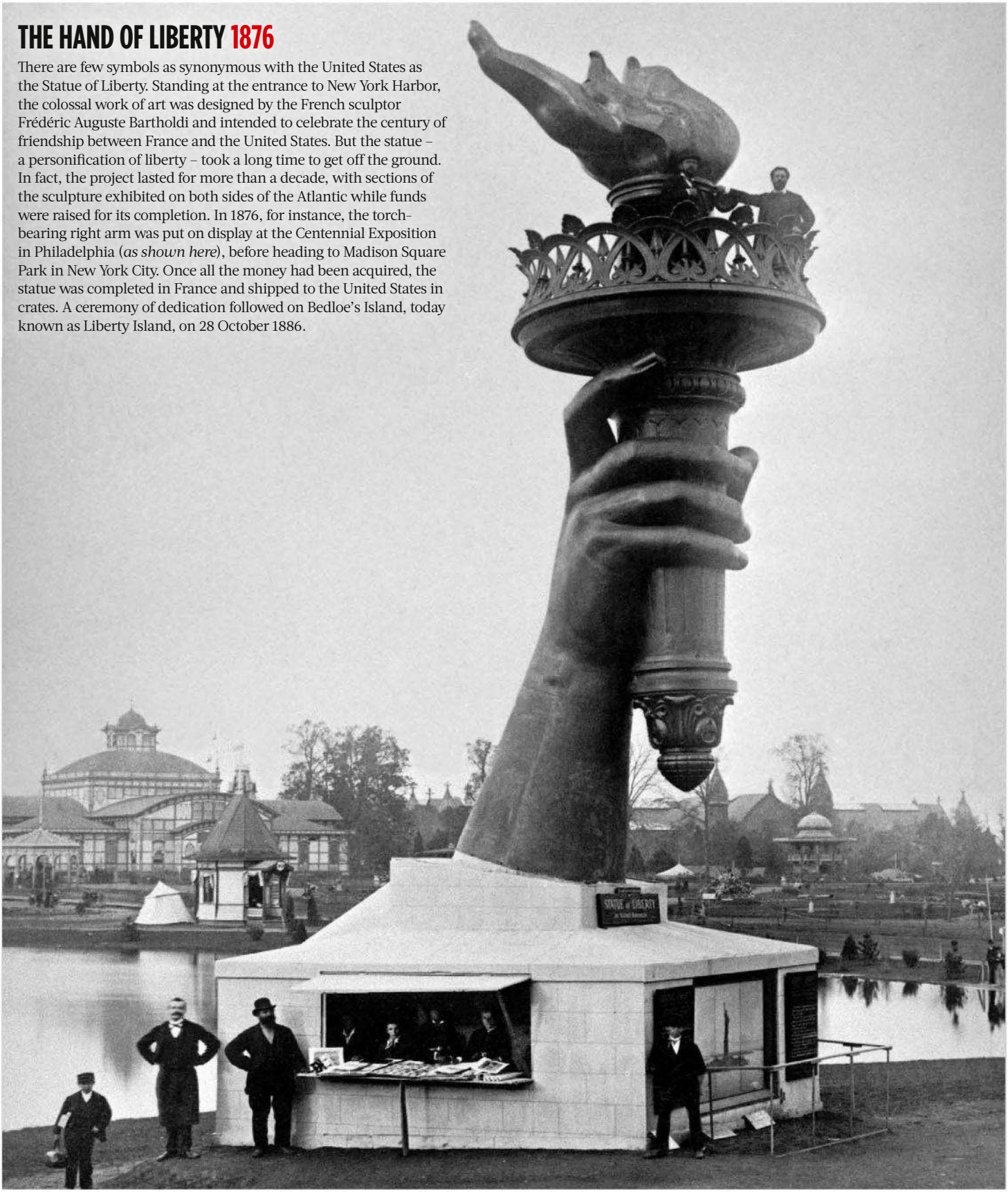
ARRESTING IMAGES FROM THE ANNALS OF THE PAST

THE HAND OF LIBERTY 1876

There are few symbols as synonymous with the United States as the Statue of Liberty. Standing at the entrance to New York Harbor, the colossal work of art was designed by the French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and intended to celebrate the century of friendship between France and the United States. But the statue – a personification of liberty – took a long time to get off the ground. In fact, the project lasted for more than a decade, with sections of the sculpture exhibited on both sides of the Atlantic while funds were raised for its completion. In 1876, for instance, the torch-bearing right arm was put on display at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (*as shown here*), before heading to Madison Square Park in New York City. Once all the money had been acquired, the statue was completed in France and shipped to the United States in crates. A ceremony of dedication followed on Bedloe's Island, today known as Liberty Island, on 28 October 1886.



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